



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

THE
KENILWORTH

BY
SIR WALTER SCOTT,
BART.





HARVARD UNIVERSITY

LIBRARY OF THE

Department of Education

COLLECTION OF TEXT-BOOKS

Contributed by the Publishers

TRANSFERRED

TO

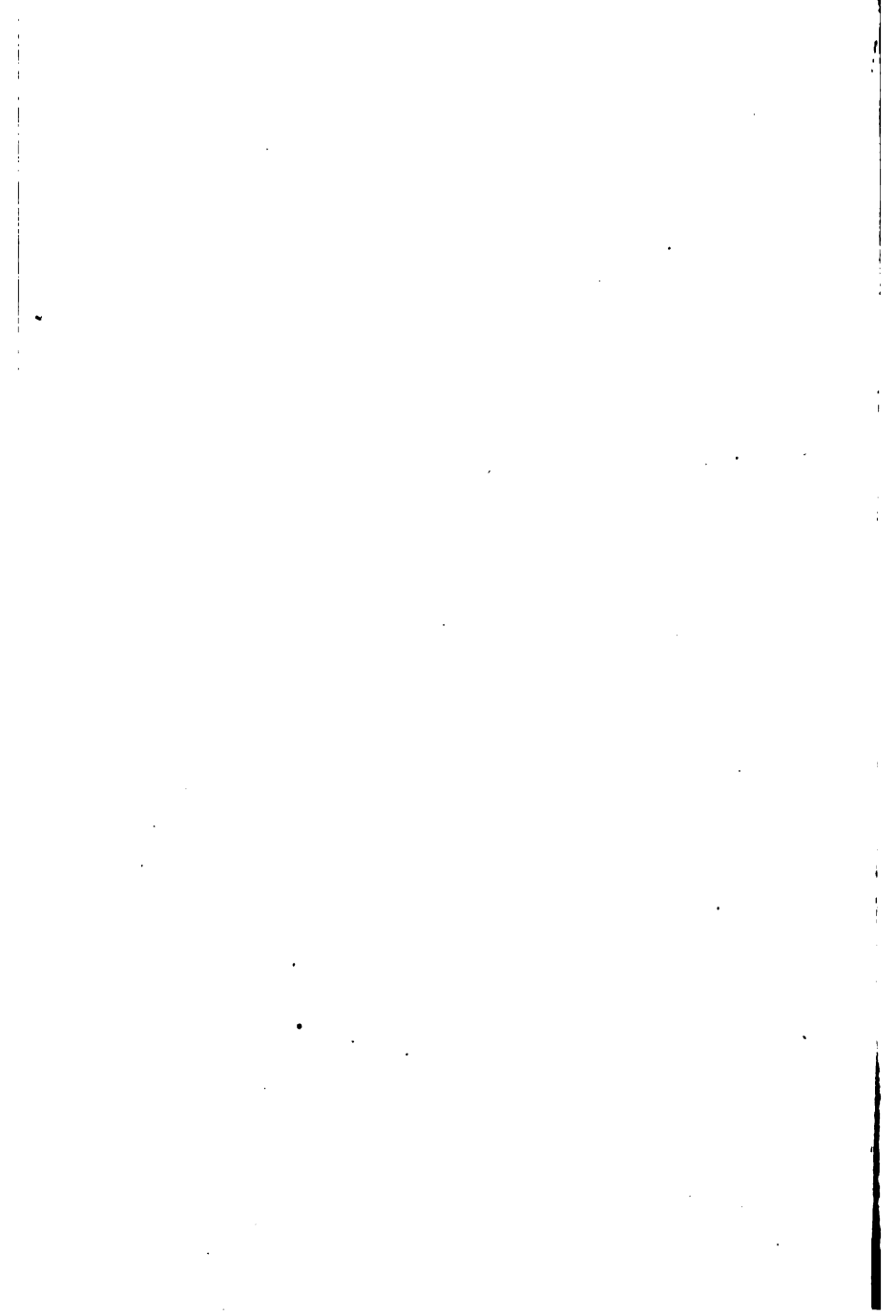
HARVARD

L



3 2044 097 060 834

2251



ECLECTIC SCHOOL READINGS

KENILWORTH

BY

SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

ABRIDGED AND EDITED BY

MARY HARRIOTT NORRIS

DEAN OF WOMEN, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY



NEW YORK . . . CINCINNATI . . . CHICAGO
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

T 88-8150 k

Educ T 879.660.146

**Harvard University,
Dept. of Education Library**

TRANSFERRED TO
HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
JUNE 12, 1929

**COPYRIGHT, 1899,
BY AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY.**

Kenilworth.

W. P. I

KENILWORTH

CHAPTER I.

THE village of Cumnor, within three or four miles of Oxford, boasted, during the eighteenth of Queen Elizabeth, an excellent inn of the old stamp, conducted, or rather ruled, by Giles Gosling, a man of a goodly person, fifty years of age and upwards, moderate in his reckonings, prompt in his payments, having a cellar of sound liquor, a ready wit, and a pretty daughter. It was in the courtyard of the inn which called this honest fellow landlord that a traveler alighted in the close of the evening and gave his horse, which seemed to have made a long journey, to the hostler. The landlord, with much semblance of hearty welcome, ushered his guest into a large low chamber, where several persons were seated together in different parties — some drinking, some playing at cards, some conversing, and some, whose business called them to be early risers on the morrow, concluding their evening meal, and conferring with the chamberlain about their night's quarters. The stranger's address was bold, without being frank, and seemed eagerly and hastily to claim for him a degree of attention and deference, which he feared would be refused, if not instantly vindicated as his right. His attire was a riding-cloak, which, when open, displayed a handsome jerkin overlaid with lace and belted with a buff girdle, which sustained a broadsword and a pair of pistols.

“ You ride well provided, sir,” said the host, looking at the weapons as he placed on the table the mulled sack which the

traveler had ordered. Are you from the Low Countries, the land of pike and caliver ? ”

“ I have been high and low, my friend, broad and wide, far and near. But here is to thee in a cup of thy sack; fill thyself another to pledge me; and, if it is less than superlative, e’en drink as you have brewed.”

“ Less than superlative ! ” said Giles Gosling, drinking off the cup, and smacking his lips with an air of ineffable relish — “ I know nothing of superlative, nor is there such a wine at the Three Cranes, in the Vintry, to my knowledge; but if you find better sack than that in the Sheres, or in the Canaries either, I would I may never touch either pot or penny more.”

“ It is neat and comfortable, mine host; but to know good liquor you should drink where the vine grows. Trust me, your Spaniard is too wise a man to send you the very soul of the grape. You should travel, mine host, if you would be deep in the mysteries of the butt and pottle-pot.”

“ In troth, Signior Guest,” said Giles Gosling, “ if I were to travel only that I might be discontented with that which I can get at home, methinks I should go but on a fool’s errand. Besides, I warrant you, there is many a fool can turn his nose up at good drink without ever having been out of the smoke of old England; as for me, I am thankful for mine own fireside.”

“ This is but a mean mind of yours, mine host,” said the stranger; “ I warrant me, all your townsfolk do not think so basely. You have gallants among you, I dare undertake, that have made the Virginia voyage, or taken a turn in the Low Countries at least. Come, cudgel your memory. Have you no friends in foreign parts that you would gladly have tidings of ? ”

“ I have one wild slip of a kinsman, who left us in the last year of Queen Mary; but he is better lost than found.”

“ Do not say so, friend, unless you have heard ill of him lately. Many a wild colt has turned out a noble steed. His name, I pray you ? ”

"Michael Lambourne," answered the landlord of the Black Bear, "a son of my sister's."

"Michael Lambourne!" said the stranger, "what, no relation to Michael Lambourne, the gallant cavalier who behaved so bravely at the siege of Venlo that Grave Maurice thanked him at the head of the army?"

"It could scarcely be my nephew," said Giles Gosling, "for he had not the courage of a hen-partridge for aught but mischief."

"The Michael Lambourne whom I knew," continued the traveler, "was a likely fellow: went always gay and well-attired."

"Our Michael," replied the host, "had the look of a dog with a bottle at its tail, and wore a coat every rag of which was bidding good-day to the rest."

"Tush, man," replied the traveler, "never fear but you will have credit by your nephew yet, especially if he be the Michael Lambourne whom I knew and loved very nearly, or altogether, as well as myself. Can you tell me no mark by which I could judge whether they be the same?"

"Faith, none that I can think of," answered Giles Gosling, "unless that our Mike had the gallows branded on his left shoulder for stealing a silver caudle-cup from Dame Snort of Hogsditch."

"Nay, there you lie like a knave, uncle," said the stranger, slipping aside his ruff, and turning down the sleeve of his doublet from his neck and shoulder; "by this good day, my shoulder is as unscarred as thine own."

"What, Mike, boy — Mike!" exclaimed the host; "and is it thou in good earnest? Nay, I have judged so for this half-hour, for I knew no other person would have ta'en half the interest in thee."

"Tush, uncle, truce with your jests. Let us see what hearty welcome thou wilt give a kinsman who has seen the sun set where it rises, and has traveled till the west has become the east. But, uncle, I come not from the husks and the swine-trough, and

I care not for thy welcome or no welcome; I carry that with me will make me welcome, wend where I will."

So saying, he pulled out a purse of gold, indifferently well filled, the sight of which produced a visible effect upon the company.

"Kinsman Michael," said Giles, "put up thy purse. My sister's son shall be called to no reckoning in my house for supper or lodging; and I reckon thou wilt hardly wish to stay longer, where thou art e'en but too well known."

"For that matter, uncle," replied the traveler, "I shall consult my own needs and conveniences. Meantime, I wish to give the supper and sleeping-cup to those good townsmen, who are not too proud to remember Mike Lambourne, the tapster's boy." Then addressing the company, he exclaimed: "Here is an infidel for you, my good neighbors! Here's a fellow will rip up his kinsman's follies of a good score of years' standing. And for the gold, why, sirs, I have been where it grew, and was to be had for the gathering."

"By my credit, friend Mike," said young Laurence Goldthred, the cutting mercer of Abingdon, "that were a likely coast to trade to. And what may lawns, cypruses, and ribands fetch where gold is so plenty?"

"O, the profit were unutterable," replied Lambourne, "especially when a handsome young merchant bears the pack himself."

"I would I might trade thither," said the mercer, chuckling.

"Why, and so thou mayst," said Michael; "that is, if thou art the same brisk boy who was partner with me at robbing the abbot's orchard."

"Nephew," interrupted the host, "yonder sits my silent guest, as I call him, who hath been my two days' inmate, and hath never spoken a word, save to ask for his food and his reckoning; gives no more trouble than a very peasant; pays his shot like a prince royal; and yet, hang-dog that I am, I have suffered

him to sit by himself like a castaway in yonder obscure nook, without so much as asking him to take a bite or sup along with us."

With his white napkin gracefully arranged over his left arm, his velvet cap laid aside for the moment, and his best silver flagon in his right hand, mine host walked up to the solitary guest whom he mentioned.

He was a man aged betwixt twenty-five and thirty, rather above the middle size, dressed with plainness and decency, yet bearing an air of ease which almost amounted to dignity, and which seemed to infer that his habit was rather beneath his rank. His countenance was reserved and thoughtful.

Honest Giles, with all comely courtesy, besought the stranger to pledge him in a draught of the cool tankard, and honor with his attention a small collation which he was giving to his nephew in honor of his return, and, as he verily hoped, of his reformation. The stranger at first shook his head as if declining the courtesy; but mine host proceeded to urge him.

"By my faith, sir," he said, "it touches my reputation that men should be merry in my house, and we have ill tongues amongst us at Cumnor — as where be there not? — who put an evil mark on men who pull their hat over their brows as if they were looking back to the days that are gone, instead of enjoying the blythe sunshiny weather which God has sent us in the sweet looks of our sovereign mistress, Queen Elizabeth, whom Heaven long bless and preserve!"

"You say well, my worthy host," said the guest, with a melancholy smile, which, melancholy as it was, gave a very pleasant expression to his countenance — "you say well, my jovial friend; and they that are moody like myself should not disturb the mirth of those who are happy. I will drink a round with your guest with all my heart, rather than be termed a mar-feast."

So saying, he arose and joined the company, who, had already made some inroads upon the limits of temperance, as was evident

from the tone in which Michael inquired after his old acquaintances in the town, and the bursts of laughter with which each answer was received.

"By what name shall I present my worshipful guest to these gallants?" inquired Giles.

"Mine host," replied the stranger, "you may call me Tressilian."

"Tressilian!" answered mine host of the Bear, "a worthy name, and, as I think, of Cornish lineage. Shall I say the worthy Mr. Tressilian of Cornwall?"

"Say no more than I have given you warrant for, mine host, and so shall you be sure you speak no more than is true."

Mine host presented Mr. Tressilian to his nephew's company, who, after exchange of salutations, pursued the conversation in which he found them engaged, seasoning it with many an intervening pledge.

After some brief interval, Master Goldthred, at the earnest instigation of mine host, and the joyous concurrence of his guests, indulged the company with the following morsel of melody:—

"Of all the birds on bush or tree,
Commend me to the owl,
Since he may best ensample be
To those the cup that trowl.
For when the sun hath left the west,
He chooses the tree that he loves the best,
And he whoops out his song, and he laughs at his jest;
Then though hours be late, and weather foul,
We'll drink to the health of the bonny, bonny owl."

"There is savor in this, my hearts," said Michael, when the mercer had finished his song, "but what a beadroll you have read me of old comrades, and to every man's name tacked some ill-omened motto! And so Swashing Will of Wallingford hath bid us good night?"

"He died the death of a fat buck," said one of the party,

“ being shot with a cross-bow bolt, by old Thatcham, the Duke’s stout park-keeper at Donnington Castle.”

“ Ay, ay, he always loved venison well,” replied Michael, “ and a cup of claret to boot; and so here’s one to his memory. Do me right, my masters.”

When the memory of this departed worthy had been duly honored, Lambourne proceeded to inquire after other old comrades, and among them, Tony Foster.

“ Which Tony Foster mean you ? ” said the innkeeper.

“ Why, he they called Tony Fire-the-Fagot, because he brought a light to kindle the pile round Latimer and Ridley, when the wind blew out Jack Thong’s torch, and no man else would give him light for love or money.”

“ Tony Foster lives and thrives,” said the host.

“ He hath prospered, I warrant him,” said Lambourne.

“ Prospered, quotha ! ” said the mercer; “ why, you remember Cumnor Place, the old mansion-house beside the church-yard ? ”

“ What of that ? It was the old abbot’s residence when there was plague or sickness at Abingdon.”

“ Ay,” said the host, “ but that has been long over; and Anthony Foster hath a right in it, and lives there by some grant from a great courtier, who had the church lands from the crown; and there he dwells, and has as little to do with any poor wight in Cumnor as if he were himself a belted knight.”

“ Nay,” said the mercer, “ it is not altogether pride in Tony neither: there is a fair lady in the case, and Tony will scarce let the light of day look on her.”

“ And why so ? ” said Tressilian.

“ Why, I wot not,” answered the host, “ except that men say she is as beautiful as an angel, and no one knows whence she comes, and every one wishes to know why she is kept so closely mewed up. For my part, I never saw her; you have, I think, Master Goldthred ? ”

"That I have, old boy," said the mercer. "Look you, I was riding hither from Abingdon — I passed under the east oriel window of the old mansion, where all the old saints and histories and such like are painted. It was not the common path I took, but one through the park; for the postern door was upon the latch, and I thought I might take the privilege of an old comrade to ride across through the trees, both for shading, as the day was somewhat hot, and for avoiding of dust, because I had on my peach-colored doublet, pinked out with cloth of gold."

"Which garment," said Michael Lambourne, "thou wouldst willingly make twinkle in the eyes of a fair dame. Ah! villain, thou wilt never leave thy old tricks."

"Nay, my good sir," said Tressilian, "let me beseech you will not interrupt the gallant citizen; methinks he tells his tale so well, I could hearken to him till midnight."

"It's more of your favor than of my desert," answered Master Goldthred; "but since I give you pleasure, worthy Master Tressilian, I shall proceed. And so, sir, as I passed under the great painted window, leaving my rein loose on my ambling palfrey's neck, partly for mine ease, and partly that I might have the more leisure to peer about, I hears me the lattice open; and never credit me, sir, if there did not stand there the person of as fair a woman as ever crossed mine eyes."

"May I ask her appearance, sir?" said Tressilian.

"O, sir," replied Master Goldthred, "I promise you, she was in gentlewoman's attire — a very quaint and pleasing dress, that might have served the Queen herself; for she had a forepart with body and sleeves, of ginger-colored satin, lined with taffeta, and laid down and guarded with two broad laces of gold and silver. And her hat, sir, was truly the best-fashioned thing I have seen in these parts, being of tawny taffeta, embroidered with scorpions of Venice gold, and having a border garnished with gold fringe. Touching her skirts, they were in the old pass-devant fashion."

"I did not ask you of her attire, sir," said Tressilian, "but of her complexion, the color of her hair, her features."

"Touching her complexion," answered the mercer, "I am not so special certain; I had little time to look at her; for just as I was about to give her the good time of day, and for that purpose had puckered my features with a smile, up started of a sudden, Tony Forster himself, with a cudgel in his hand——"

"And broke thy head across, I hope, for thine impertinence," said his entertainer.

"That were more easily said than done," answered Goldthred indignantly; "no, no — there was no breaking of heads; it's true, he advanced his cudgel, and spoke of laying on, and asked why I did not keep the public road, and such-like; and I would have knocked him over the pate handsomely for his pains, only for the lady's presence, who might have swooned, for what I know."

"Now, out upon thee for a faint-spirited slave!" said Lambourne; "what adventurous knight ever thought of the lady's terror when he went to thwack giant, dragon, or magician in her presence, and for her deliverance? There thou hast missed the rarest opportunity!"

"Take it thyself then, bully Mike," answered Goldthred. "Yonder is the enchanted manor, and the dragon, and the lady, all at thy service, if thou darest venture on them."

"Why, so I would for a quartern of sack,¹" said the soldier. "Or, stay — I am foully out of linen — wilt thou bet a piece of Hollands² against these five angels³ that I go not up to the hall to-morrow and force Tony Foster to introduce me to his fair guest?"

"I accept your wager," said the mercer. "Our landlord here shall hold stakes, and I will stake down gold till I send the linen."

¹ A gill of old wine. ² Holland linen. ³ Gold coins bearing the figure of the archangel Michael and worth about two dollars each.

"I would gladly pay your halves of the risk, sir," said Tressilian, "to be permitted to accompany you on the adventure."

"In what would that advantage you, sir?" answered Lambourne.

"In nothing, sir," said Tressilian, "unless to mark the skill and valor with which you conduct yourself. I am a traveler, who seeks for strange rencounters and uncommon passages, as the knights of yore did after adventures and feats of arms."

"Nay, if it pleases you to see a trout tickled," answered Lambourne, "I care not how many witness my skill."

The party soon afterwards broke up, and the guests took their leave; much more to the contentment of mine host than of some of the company, who were unwilling to quit good liquor, when it was to be had for free cost, so long as they were able to sit by it. They were, however, compelled to remove; and go at length they did.

CHAPTER II.

"AND how doth your kinsman, good mine host?" said Tressilian, when Giles Gosling first appeared in the public room, on the morning following the revel which we described in the last chapter. "Is he well, and will he abide by his wager?"

"For well, sir, he started two hours since, and has visited I know not what purlieus of his old companions; hath but now returned, and is at this instant breakfasting on new-laid eggs and muscadine; and for his wager, I caution you as a friend to have little to do with that."

"It seems to me, mine host," said Tressilian, "that you know not well what to say about this kinsman of yours; and that you can neither blame nor commend him without some twinge of conscience. But this Foster, who or what is he, and why makes he such mystery of his female inmate?"

"Troth," replied Gosling, "I can add but little to what you heard last night. He was one of Queen Mary's Papists, and now he is one of Queen Elizabeth's Protestants; he was an onhanger of the abbot of Abingdon, and now he lives as master of the manor-house. Above all, he was poor and is rich. Folk talk of private apartments in his old waste mansion-house bedizened fine enough to serve the Queen, God bless her! Some men think he found a treasure in the orchard, some that he sold himself to the devil for treasure, and some say that he cheated the abbot out of the church plate which was hidden in the old manor-house at the Reformation. I think it likely my kinsman and he will quarrel, if Mike thrust his acquaintance on him; and I am sorry that you, my worthy Master Tressilian, will still think of going in my nephew's company."

Tressilian again answered him, that he would proceed with great caution, and that he should have no fears on his account.

Meantime the traveler had just finished the excellent breakfast which was served to him, when the hero of the preceding night, Michael Lambourne, entered the apartment. His toilet had apparently cost him some labor, for his clothes, which differed from those he wore on his journey, were of the newest fashion, and put on with great attention to the display of his person.

"By my faith, nephew," said Giles Gosling, "how brave thou be'st, lad! To look on thee now, and compare thee with Master Tressilian here, in his sad-colored riding-suit, who would not say that thou wert the real gentleman and he the tapster's boy?"

"Troth, uncle," replied Lambourne, "no one would say so but one of your country breeding, that knows no better. I will say, and I care not who hears me, there is something about the real gentry that few men come up to that are not born and bred to the mystery. But I have gentry enough to pass the trick on Tony Fire-the-Fagot, and that will do for the matter in hand."

"You hold your purpose, then, of visiting your old acquaintance?" said Tressilian to the adventurer.

"Ay, sir," replied Lambourne: "when stakes are made, the game must be played. You, sir, unless my memory fails me, took some share in my hazard?"

"I still propose to accompany you in your adventure," said Tressilian, "and I have staked my share of the forfeit in the hands of our worthy host."

"Luck to your enterprise," said Giles Gosling, "since you will needs venture on Tony Foster; but, by my credit, you had better take another draught before you depart, for your welcome at the hall yonder will be somewhat of the dryest."

The nephew dutifully obeyed his uncle's hint, and they set forth together for the habitation of Anthony Foster.

The village of Cumnor is pleasantly built on a hill, and in a wooded park closely adjacent was situated the ancient mansion occupied at this time by Anthony Foster. The park was then full of large trees, and in particular of ancient and mighty oaks, which stretched their giant arms over the high wall surrounding the demesne, thus giving it a melancholy, secluded, and monastic appearance. The entrance to the park lay through an old-fashioned gateway in the outer wall, the door of which was formed of two huge oaken leaves, thickly studded with nails, like the gate of an old town.

"We shall be finely helped up here," said Michael Lambourne, looking at the gateway and gate, "if this fellow's suspicious humor should refuse us admission altogether, as it is like he may. But, no," he added, pushing the huge gate, which gave way, "the door stands invitingly open; and here we are within the forbidden ground."

They stood now in an avenue overshadowed by such old trees as we have described, and which had been bordered at one time by high hedges of yew and holly. But these, having been untrimmed for many years, had run up into great bushes, or rather dwarf trees, and now encroached, with their dark and melancholy boughs, upon the road which they once had screened.

The avenue itself was grown up with grass, and in one or two places interrupted by piles of withered brushwood, which had been lopped from the trees cut down in the neighboring park, and was here stacked for drying. Formal walks and avenues, which, at different points, crossed this principal approach, were in like manner choked up and interrupted by piles of brushwood and billets, and in other places by underwood and brambles. The size of the trees and the outspreading extent of their boughs diffused a gloom over the scene, even when the sun was at the highest. This was felt even by Michael Lambourne.

"This wood is as dark as a wolf's mouth," said he to Tressilian, as they walked together slowly along the solitary and broken approach, and had just come in sight of the monastic front of the old mansion, with its shafted windows, brick walls overgrown with ivy and creeping shrubs, and twisted stalks of chimneys of heavy stonework. "And yet," continued Lambourne, "it is fairly done on the part of Foster too; for, since he chooses not visitors, it is right to keep his place in a fashion that will invite few to trespass upon his privacy."

"May I ask you, Master Lambourne," said Tressilian, "since your old companion's humor jumps so little with your own, wherefore you are so desirous to renew acquaintance with him?"

"And may I ask you, in return, Master Tressilian," answered Lambourne, "wherefore you have shown yourself so desirous to accompany me on this party?"

"I told you my motive," said Tressilian, "when I took share in your wager: it was simple curiosity."

"La you there now!" answered Lambourne. "See how you civil and discreet gentlemen think to use us who live by the free exercise of our wits! Had I answered your question by saying that it was simple curiosity which led me to visit my old comrade, Anthony Foster, I warrant you had set it down for an evasion and a turn of my trade."

"And wherefore should not bare curiosity," said Tressilian, "be a sufficient reason for my taking this walk with you?"

"O, content yourself, sir," replied Lambourne; "you cannot put the change on me so easy as you think, for I have lived among the quick-stirring spirits of the age too long to swallow chaff for grain. You are a gentleman of birth and breeding, and yet you associate yourself with a sort of scant-of-grace, as men call me; and, knowing me to be such, you make yourself my companion in a visit to a man whom you are a stranger to — and all out of mere curiosity, forsooth!"

"If your suspicions were just," said Tressilian, "you have shown no confidence in me to invite or deserve mine."

"O, if that be all," said Lambourne, "my motives lie above water. While this gold of mine lasts," taking out his purse, chucking it into the air, and catching it as it fell, "I will make it buy pleasure, and when it is out, I must have more. Now, if this mysterious Lady of the Manor be so admirable a piece as men say, why, there is chance that she may aid me to melt my nobles into groats; and, again, if Anthony be so wealthy a chuff as report speaks him, he may prove the philosopher's stone to me, and convert my groats into fair rose nobles again."

While he thus spoke, they had entered a large orchard which surrounded the house on two sides, though the trees were overgrown and mossy, and seemed to bear little fruit. The greater part of the ground, which had once been parterres and flower-gardens, was suffered in like manner to run to waste, excepting a few patches which had been dug up, and planted with ordinary pot herbs. Some statues, which had ornamented the garden in its days of splendor, were now thrown down from their pedestals and broken in pieces, and a large summer-house, having a heavy stone front, decorated with carving, representing the life and actions of Samson, was in the same dilapidated condition.

Lambourne knocked roundly and boldly at the huge door of the mansion, observing at the same time, he had seen a less

strong one upon a county jail. It was not until they had knocked more than once that an aged, sour-visaged domestic reconnoitred them through a small square hole in the door, well secured with bars of iron, and demanded what they wanted.

“To speak with Master Foster instantly, on pressing business of the state,” was the ready reply of Michael Lambourne.

The servant went to carry the message to his master, and in a short time returned. Drawing with a careful hand both bolt and bar, he opened the gate and admitted them through an archway into a square court, surrounded by buildings. Opposite to the arch was another door, which the serving-man in like manner unlocked, and thus introduced them into a stone-paved parlor, where there was but little furniture, and that of the rudest and most ancient fashion. The windows were tall and ample, reaching almost to the roof of the room, which was composed of black oak; those opening to the quadrangle were obscured by the height of the surrounding buildings, and by no means admitted light in proportion to their size; and what did penetrate through them partook of the dark and gloomy tinge of the stained glass.

Tressilian and his guide waited some space in the apartment ere the present master of the mansion at length made his appearance. He was of middle stature, built strongly, but so clumsily as to border on deformity and to give all his motions the ungainly awkwardness of a left-legged and left-handed man. His hair, in arranging which men at that time were very nice and curious, instead of being carefully cleaned and disposed into short curls, or else set upon end, as is represented in old paintings, escaped in sable negligence from under a furred bonnet, and hung in elf-locks over his rugged brows, and around his very singular and unprepossessing countenance. His keen dark eyes were deep set beneath broad and shaggy eyebrows, and as they were usually bent on the ground, seemed as if they were themselves ashamed of the expression natural to them, and were desirous to conceal

it from the observation of men. At times, however, when, more intent on observing others, he suddenly raised them, and fixed them keenly on those with whom he conversed, they seemed to express both the fiercer passions and the power of mind which could at will suppress or disguise the intensity of inward feeling. The features which corresponded with these eyes and this form were irregular, and marked so as to be indelibly fixed on the mind of him who had once seen them. Upon the whole, as Tressilian could not help acknowledging to himself, the Anthony Foster who now stood before them was the last person, judging from personal appearance, upon whom one would have chosen to intrude an unexpected and undesired visit. His attire was a doublet of russet leather, like those worn by the better sort of country folk, girt with a buff belt, in which was stuck on the right side a long knife, or dudgeon dagger, and on the other a cutlass. He raised his eyes as he entered the room, and fixed a keenly penetrating glance upon his two visitors, then cast them down as if counting his steps, while he advanced slowly into the middle of the room, and said, in a low and smothered tone of voice, "Let me pray you, gentlemen, to tell me the cause of this visit."

He looked as if he expected the answer from Tressilian; so true was Lambourne's observation, that the superior air of breeding and dignity shone through the disguise of an inferior dress. But it was Michael who replied to him, with the easy familiarity of an old friend, and a tone which seemed unembarrassed by any doubt of the most cordial reception.

"Ha! my dear friend and ingle, Tony Foster!" he exclaimed, seizing upon the unwilling hand; "how fares it with you for many a long year? What! have you altogether forgotten your friend, gossip, and playfellow, Michael Lambourne?"

"Michael Lambourne!" said Foster, looking at him a moment; and with little ceremony extricating his hand from the friendly grasp of the person by whom he was addressed — "are you Michael Lambourne?"

"Ay, sure as you are Anthony Foster," replied Lambourne.

"'Tis well," answered his sullen host; "and what may Michael Lambourne expect from his visit hither?"

"I expected a better welcome than I am like to meet, I think," answered Lambourne.

"Why, thou gallows-bird — thou jail-rat — thou friend of the hangman and his customers," replied Foster, "hast thou the assurance to expect countenance from any one whose neck is beyond the compass of a hangman's noose?"

"It may be with me as you say," replied Lambourne; "and suppose I grant it to be so for argument's sake, I were still good enough society for mine ancient friend Anthony Fire-the-Fagot."

"Hark you, Michael Lambourne," said Foster; "you are a gambler now, and live by the counting of chances. Compute me the odds that I do not, on this instant, throw you out of that window into the ditch there."

"Twenty to one that you do not," answered the sturdy visitor.

"And wherefore, I pray you?" demanded Anthony Foster, setting his teeth and compressing his lips, like one who endeavors to suppress some violent internal emotion.

"Because," said Lambourne, coolly, "you dare not for your life lay a finger on me. I am younger and stronger than you, and have in me a double portion of the fighting devil, though not, it may be, quite so much of the undermining fiend, who hides halters under folks' pillows, and who puts ratsbane into their porridge, as the stage-play says."

Foster looked at him earnestly, then turned away, and paced the room twice, with the same steady and considerate pace with which he had entered it; then suddenly came back, and extended his hand to Michael Lambourne, saying, "Be not wroth with me, good Mike; I did but try whether thou hadst parted with aught of thine old and honorable frankness, which your enviers and backbiters called saucy impudence."

"Let them call it what they will," said Michael Lambourne, "it is the commodity we must carry through the world with us."

"I prithee, know Master Tressilian, bully Foster," continued Lambourne, presenting his friend; "and though he traffics not in my line of business, at least so far as I know, he has, nevertheless, a just respect and admiration for artists of our class."

"If such be his quality, I will pray your company in another chamber, honest Mike, for what I have to say to thee is for thy private ear. Meanwhile, I pray you, sir, to abide us in this apartment, and without leaving it: there be those in this house who would be alarmed by the sight of a stranger."

Tressilian acquiesced, and the two worthies left the apartment together, in which he remained alone to await their return.

CHAPTER III.

THE room into which the master of Cumnor Place conducted his worthy visitant was of greater extent than that in which they had at first conversed, and had yet more the appearance of dilapidation. Large oaken presses, filled with shelves of the same wood, surrounded the room, and had, at one time, served for the arrangement of a numerous collection of books, many of which yet remained, but torn and defaced, covered with dust, deprived of their costly clasps and bindings, and tossed together in heaps upon the shelves.

"The men who wrote these books," said Lambourne, looking round him, "little thought whose keeping they were to fall into."

"Pshaw — pshaw," answered Foster, "they are Popish trash, every one of them — private studies of the mumping old abbot of Abingdon. The nineteenthly of a pure Gospel sermon were worth a cart load of such rakings of the kennel of Rome."

"I prithee peace, Foster," said Lambourne. "Do I not

remember how you were wont to carry your conscience to confession, as duly as the month came round ? and when thou hadst it scoured, and burnished, and whitewashed by the priest, thou wert ever ready for the worst villainy which could be devised."

"Trouble not thyself about my conscience," said Foster, "it is a thing thou canst not understand, having never had one of thine own. But let us rather to the point, and say to me, in one word, what is thy business with me, and what hopes have drawn thee hither ?"

"The hope of bettering myself, to be sure," answered Lambourne. "Look you, this purse has all that is left of as round a sum as a man would wish to carry in his slop-pouch. You are here well established, it would seem, and, as I think, well befriended, for men talk of thy being under some special protection. Now I know such protection is not purchased for nought: you must have services to render for it, and in these I propose to help thee."

"But how if I lack no assistance from thee, Mike ?"

"That is to say," retorted Lambourne, "that you would engross the whole work rather than divide the reward; but be not over-greedy, Anthony. When the huntsman goes to kill a stag, he takes with him more dogs than one. He has the stanch lyme-hound to track the wounded buck over the hill and dale, but he hath also the fleet gaze-hound to kill him at view. Thou art the lyme-hound, I am the gaze-hound, and thy patron will need the aid of both; and can well afford to requite it. How sayst thou, shall we hunt in couples ?"

"It is a currish proposal, thus to thrust thyself upon my private matters," replied Foster; "but thou wert ever an ill-nurtured whelp."

"You shall have no cause to say so, unless you spurn my courtesy," said Michael Lambourne. "I will either share your counsels or traverse them; for I have come here to be busy, either with thee or against thee."

"Well," said Anthony Foster, "since thou dost leave me so fair a choice, I will rather be thy friend than thine enemy. Thou art right: I *can* prefer thee to the service of a patron who has enough of means to make us both and an hundred more. And, to say truth, thou art well qualified for his service."

At this moment their conversation was interrupted by a scream from the next apartment.

"By the holy cross of Abingdon," exclaimed Anthony Foster, forgetting his Protestantism in his alarm, "I am a ruined man!"

So saying, he rushed into the apartment whence the scream issued, followed by Michael Lambourne. But to account for the sounds which interrupted their conversation it is necessary to recede a little way in our narrative.

It has been already observed that, when Lambourne accompanied Foster into the library, they left Tressilian alone in the ancient parlor. His dark eye followed them with a glance of contempt, a part of which his mind instantly transferred to himself, for having stooped to be even for a moment their familiar companion. "These are the associates, Amy" — it was thus he communed with himself — "to which thy cruel levity, thine unthinking and most unmerited falsehood, has condemned him of whom his friends once hoped far other things, and who now scorns himself, as he will be scorned by others, for the baseness he stoops to for the love of thee! But I will not leave the pursuit of thee, once the object of my purest and most devoted affection. I will restore thee to thy parents — to thy God."

A slight noise in the apartment interrupted his reverie; he looked round, and in the beautiful and richly-attired female who entered at that instant by a side door he recognised the object of his search. The first impulse arising from this discovery urged him to conceal his face with the collar of his cloak, until he should find a favorable moment of making himself known. But his purpose was disconcerted by the young lady, (she was not above eighteen years old), who ran joyfully towards him, and

pulling him by the cloak, said playfully, "Nay, my sweet friend, after I have waited for you so long, you come not to my bower to play the masquer."

"Alas, Amy!" said Tressilian, in a low and melancholy tone, as he suffered her to draw the mantle from his face. The sound of his voice, and still more the unexpected sight of his face, changed in an instant the lady's playful mood. She staggered back, turned as pale as death, and put her hands before her face.

Tressilian was himself for a moment much overcome, but seeming suddenly to remember the necessity of using an opportunity which might not again occur, he said in a low tone, "Amy, fear me not."

"Why should I fear you?" said the lady, withdrawing her hands from her beautiful face, which was now covered with crimson — "why should I fear you, Mr. Tressilian? or wherefore have you intruded yourself into my dwelling, uninvited, sir, and unwished for?"

"Your dwelling, Amy!" said Tressilian. "Alas! is a prison your dwelling? — a prison guarded by one of the most sordid of men, but not a greater wretch than his employer!"

"This house is mine," said Amy — "mine while I choose to inhabit it. If it is my pleasure to live in seclusion, who shall gainsay me?"

"Your father, maiden," answered Tressilian — "your broken-hearted father, who despatched me in quest of you with that authority which he cannot exert in person. Here is his letter, written while he blessed his pain of body which somewhat stunned the agony of his mind."

"The pain! is my father then ill?" said the lady.

"So ill," answered Tressilian, "that even your utmost haste may not restore him to health; but all shall be instantly prepared for your departure the instant you yourself will give consent."

"Tressilian," answered the lady, "I cannot — I must not — I dare not leave this place. Go back to my father; tell him

I will obtain leave to see him within twelve hours from hence. Go back, Tressilian; tell him I am well, I am happy — happy could I think he was so; tell him not to fear that I will come, and in such a manner that all the grief Amy has given him shall be forgotten — the poor Amy is now greater than she dare name. Go, good Tressilian; I have injured thee too, but believe me I have power to heal the wounds I have caused: I robbed you of a childish heart, which was not worthy of you, and I can repay the loss with honors and advancement."

"Do you say this to me, Amy? Do you offer me pageants of idle ambition for the quiet peace you have robbed me of? But be it so — I came not to upbraid, but to serve and to free you. You cannot disguise it from me — you are a prisoner. Otherwise your kind heart — for it was once a kind heart — would have been already at your father's bedside."

"Have I not already said, Tressilian," replied she, "that I will surely come to my father, and that without farther delay than is necessary to discharge other and equally binding duties? Go, carry him the news. I come as sure as there is light in heaven — that is, when I obtain permission."

"Permission! — permission to visit your father on his sick-bed, perhaps on his deathbed!" repeated Tressilian, impatiently; "and permission from whom? From the villain who, under disguise of friendship, abused every duty of hospitality, and stole thee from thy father's roof!"

"Do him no slander, Tressilian! He whom thou speakest of wears a sword as sharp as thine — sharper, vain man; for the best deeds thou hast ever done in peace or war were as unworthy to be named with his as thy obscure rank to match itself with the sphere he moves in. Leave me! Go, do mine errand to my father, and when he next sends to me, let him choose a more welcome messenger."

"Amy," replied Tressilian, calmly, "thou canst not move me by thy reproaches. With thy will — thine uninfluenced, free,

and natural will, Amy, thou canst not choose this state of slavery and dishonor: thou hast been bound by some spell — entrapped by some deceit — art now detained by some compelled vow. But thus I break the charm: Amy, in the name of thine excellent, thy broken-hearted father, I command thee to follow me!"

As he spoke, he advanced and extended his arm, as with the purpose of laying hold upon her. But she shrunk back from his grasp, and uttered the scream which, as we before noticed, brought into the apartment Lambourne and Foster.

The latter exclaimed, as soon as he entered, "Fire and fagot! what have we here?" Then addressing the lady, in a tone betwixt entreaty and command, he added, "Uds precious! madam, what make you here out of bounds? Retire — retire; there is life and death in this matter. And you, friend, whoever you may be, leave this house: out with you. Draw, Mike, and rid us of the knave!"

"Not I, on my soul," replied Lambourne; "he came hither in my company, and he is safe from me by cutter's law, at least till we meet again. But hark ye, my Cornish comrade, you have brought a Cornish flaw of wind with you hither — a hurricane as they call it in the Indies. Make yourself scarce — depart — vanish!"

"Away, base groom!" said Tressilian. "And you, madam, fare you well; what life lingers in your father's bosom will leave him at the news I have to tell."

He departed, the lady saying faintly as he left the room, "Tressilian, be not rash — say no scandal of me."

Tressilian pursued the first path which promised to conduct him through the wild and overgrown park in which the mansion of Foster was situated. Haste and distress of mind led his steps astray, and, instead of taking the avenue which led towards the village, he chose another, which conducted him to the other side of the demesne, where a postern door opened through the wall, and led into the open country. As he approached to try some

means of opening the door, or climbing over it, he perceived there was a key put into the lock from the outside. It turned round, the bolt revolved, and a cavalier, who entered, muffled in his riding-cloak, and wearing a slouched hat with a drooping feather, stood at once within four yards of him who was desirous of going out. They exclaimed at once, in tones of resentment and surprise, the one "Varney!" the other "Tressilian!"

"What make you here?" was the stern question put by the stranger to Tressilian, when the moment of surprise was past.

"Nay, Varney," replied Tressilian, "what make *you* here? Are you come to triumph over the innocence you have destroyed? Or are you come to encounter the merited vengeance of an honest man? Draw, dog, and defend thyself!"

Tressilian drew his sword as he spoke; but Varney only laid his hand on the hilt of his own, as he replied, "Thou art mad, Tressilian. I own appearances are against me, but by every oath a priest can make, or a man can swear, Mistress Amy Robsart hath had no injury from me; and in truth I were somewhat loth to hurt you in this cause. Thou know'st I can fight."

"I have heard thee say so, Varney," replied Tressilian; "but now, methinks, I would fain have some better evidence than thine own word."

"That shall not be lacking," answered Varney; and drawing his sword with the right hand, he threw his cloak around his left, and attacked Tressilian with a vigor which, for a moment, seemed to give him the advantage of the combat. But this advantage lasted not long. Tressilian added to a spirit determined on revenge a hand and eye admirably well adapted to the use of the rapier; so that Varney, finding himself hard pressed in his turn, endeavored to avail himself of his superior strength, by closing with his adversary. For this purpose, he hazarded the receiving one of Tressilian's passes in his cloak, wrapt as it was around his arm, and ere his adversary could extricate his rapier thus entangled, he closed with him, shortening his own

sword at the same time, with the purpose of despatching him. But Tressilian was on his guard, and, unsheathing his poinard, parried with the blade of that weapon the home-thrust which would otherwise have finished the combat, and, in the struggle which followed, displayed so much address as might have confirmed the opinion that he drew his origin from Cornwall, whose natives are such masters in the art of wrestling. Varney, in his ill-advised attempt, received a fall so sudden and violent that his sword flew several paces from his hand, and ere he could recover his feet that of his antagonist was pointed to his throat.

“Give me the instant means of relieving the victim of thy treachery,” said Tressilian, “or take the last look of your Creator’s blessed sun!”

And while Varney, too confused or too sullen to reply, made a sudden effort to arise, his adversary drew back his arm, and would have executed his threat, but that the blow was arrested by the grasp of Michael Lambourne, who, directed by the clashing of swords, had come up just in time to save the life of Varney.

“Off, abject!” said Tressilian, striking himself free of Lambourne’s grasp.

“Abject — abject!” repeated Lambourne; “that shall be answered with cold steel whenever a bowl of sack has washed out memory of the morning’s draught that we had together. In the meanwhile, do you see, shog — tramp — begone; we are two to one.”

He spoke truth, for Varney had taken the opportunity to regain his weapon, and Tressilian perceived it was madness to press the quarrel farther against such odds. He took his purse from his side, and taking out two gold nobles, flung them to Lambourne: “There, caitiff, is thy morning wage: thou shalt not say thou hast been my guide unhired. Varney, farewell; we shall meet where there are none to come betwixt us.” So saying, he turned round, and departed through the postern door.

Varney seemed to want the inclination to follow his retreating enemy. But he glared darkly as he disappeared, and then addressed Lambourne — “ Art thou a comrade of Foster’s, good fellow ? ”

“ Sworn friends, as the haft is to the knife,” replied Michael Lambourne.

“ Here is a broad piece for thee; follow yonder fellow, and see where he takes earth, and bring me word up to the mansion-house here. Cautious and silent, thou knave, as thou valuest thy throat.”

“ Enough said,” replied Lambourne; “ I can draw on a scent as well as a sleuth-hound.”

“ Begone then,” said Varney, sheathing his rapier; and, turning his back on Michael Lambourne, he walked slowly towards the house.

CHAPTER IV.

ANTHONY FOSTER was still engaged in debate with his fair guest, who treated with scorn every entreaty and request that she would retire to her own apartment, when a whistle was heard at the entrance door of the mansion.

“ We are fairly sped now,” said Foster; “ yonder is thy lord’s signal, and what to say about the disorder which has happened in this household, by my conscience, I known not.”

“ Peace, sir,” said the lady, “ and undo the gate to your master. My lord! — my dear lord!” she then exclaimed, hastening to the entrance of the apartment; then added, with a voice expressive of disappointment, “ Pooh! it is but Richard Varney.”

“ Ay, madam,” said Varney, entering and saluting the lady with a respectful obeisance, which she returned with a careless mixture of negligence and of displeasure, “ it is but Richard

Varney; but even the first grey cloud should be acceptable, when it lightens in the east, because it announces the approach of the blessed sun."

"How! comes my lord hither to-night?" said the lady, in joyful yet startled agitation. Varney replied to the lady, that his lord purposed to attend her, and would have proceeded with some compliment, when, running to the door of the parlor, she called aloud, "Janet — Janet, come to my tiring-room instantly." Then returning to Varney, she asked if her lord sent any further commendations to her.

"This letter, honored madam," said he, taking from his bosom a small parcel wrapt in scarlet silk, "and with it a token to the queen of his affections." With eager speed the lady hastened to undo the silken string which surrounded the little packet, and failing to unloose readily the knot with which it was secured, she again called loudly on Janet — "Bring me a knife — scissors — aught that may undo this envious knot!"

"May not my poor poniard serve, honored madam," said Varney, presenting a small dagger of exquisite workmanship, which hung in his Turkey-leather sword-belt.

"No, sir," replied the lady, rejecting the instrument which he offered. "Steel poniard shall cut no truelove knot of mine."

By this time the knot was disentangled without any other help than the neat and nimble fingers of Janet — a simply-attired, pretty maiden, the daughter of Anthony Foster, who came running at the repeated call of her mistress. A necklace of orient pearl, the companion of a perfumed billet, was now hastily produced from the packet. The lady gave the one, after a slight glance, to the charge of her attendant, while she read, or rather devoured, the contents of the other.

"Surely, lady," said Janet, gazing with admiration at the neck-string of pearls, "the daughters of Tyre wore no fairer neck-jewels than these. And then the posy, 'For a neck that is fairer,' — each pearl is worth a freehold."

"Each word in this dear paper is worth the whole string, my girl. But come to my tiring-room, girl; we must be brave, my lord comes hither to-night. He bids me grace you, Master Varney, and to me his wish is a law. I bid you to a collation in my bower this afternoon, and you, too, Master Foster. Give orders that all is fitting, and that suitable preparations be made for my lord's reception to-night." With these words she left the apartment.

"She takes state on her already," said Varney. "Well, it is wise to practise beforehand the part which fortune prepares us to play: the young eagle must gaze at the sun, ere he soars on strong wing to meet it."

"If holding her head aloft," said Foster, "will keep her eyes from dazzling, I warrant you the dame will not stoop her crest. She will presently soar beyond reach of my whistle, Master Varney."

"Hold thy tongue," answered Varney; "and answer me, thou paltering knave, how came Tressilian to be at the postern door?"

"Tressilian!" answered Foster, "what know I of Tressilian? I never heard his name."

"Why, villain, it was the very Cornish chough to whom old Sir Hugh Robsart destined his pretty Amy, and hither the hot-brained fool has come to look after his fair runaway. Luckily he knows naught of my lord, but thinks he has only me to deal with. But how, in the fiend's name, came he hither?"

"Why, with Mike Lambourne, an you must know," answered Foster.

"And who is Mike Lambourne?" demanded Varney.

"Ay! ay!" replied Foster. "Didst thou not charge me to seek out for thee a fellow who had a good sword and an unscrupulous conscience? and was I not busying myself to find a fit man, when as heaven would have it, this tall fellow came hither to fix acquaintance upon me in the plenitude of his impudence, and I admitted his claim, thinking to do you a pleasure."

"And did he," said Varney, "being such a fellow as thyself, only lacking, I suppose, thy present humor of hypocrisy, did he, I say, bring the saintly, sighing Tressilian in his train?"

"They came together," said Foster; "and Tressilian obtained a moment's interview with our pretty moppet while I was talking apart with Lambourne."

"Improvident villain! we are both undone," said Varney. "She has of late been casting many a backward look to her father's halls, whenever her lordly lover leaves her alone. Should this preaching fool whistle her back to her old perch, we were but lost men."

"No fear of that, my master," replied Anthony Foster; "she is in no mood to stoop to his lure, for she yelled out on seeing him as if an adder had stung her."

"That is good. Canst thou not get from thy daughter an inkling of what passed between them, good Foster?"

"I tell you plain, Master Varney," said Foster, "my daughter shall not enter our purposes or walk in our paths. They may suit me well enough, who know how to repent of my misdoings; but I will not have my child's soul committed to peril either for your pleasure or my lord's."

"Why, thou suspicious fool, I were as averse as thou art that thy baby-faced girl should enter into my plans, or walk to hell at her father's elbow. But indirectly thou mightst gain some intelligence of her?"

"And so I did, Master Varney," answered Foster; "and she said her lady called out upon the sickness of her father."

"Good!" replied Varney; "that is a hint worth catching, and I will work upon it. But the country must be rid of this Tressilian. He will come prowling again about your demesne or into your house, and if you take him for a housebreaker or a park-breaker, is it not most natural you should welcome him with cold steel or hot lead? Even a mastiff will pull down those who come near his kennel."

“ Ay, I have a mastiff’s work and a mastiff’s wage among you,” said Foster. “ Here have you, Master Varney, secured a good freehold estate out of this old superstitious foundation; and I have but a poor lease of this mansion under you, voidable at your honor’s pleasure.”

“ Ay, and thou wouldst fain convert thy leasehold into a copyhold; the thing may chance to happen, Anthony Foster, if thou dost good service for it. And now let thy knave come and pluck off my boots. Get us some dinner, and a cup of thy best wine. I must visit this mavis, brave in apparel, unruffled in aspect, and gay in temper. In the meantime, hast thou arranged all the matters which were sent from London, and put the western chambers into such fashion as may answer my lord’s humor ? ”

“ They may serve a king on his bridal-day,” said Anthony; “ and I promise you that Dame Amy sits in them yonder as proud and gay as if she were the Queen of Sheba.”

“ ’Tis the better, good Anthony,” answered Varney; “ we must found our future fortunes on her good liking.”

“ We build on sand then,” said Anthony Foster; “ for, supposing that she sails away to court in all her lord’s dignity and authority, how is she to look back upon me, who am her jailer as it were, to detain her here against her will ? ”

“ Fear not her displeasure, man,” said Varney. “ I will show her that all thou hast done in this matter was good service, both to my lord and her; and when she chips the eggshell and walks alone, she shall own we have hatched her greatness.”

“ Look to yourself, Master Varney,” said Foster, “ you may misreckon foully in this matter. She gave you but a frosty reception this morning, and, I think, looks on you, as well as me, with an evil eye.”

“ You mistake her, Foster — you mistake her utterly. To me she is bound by all the ties which can secure her to one who has been the means of gratifying both her love and ambition. Who was it that took the obscure Amy Robsart, the

daughter of an impoverished and dotard knight, the destined bride of a moonstruck, moping enthusiast like Edmund Tressilian, from her lowly fates, and held out to her in prospect the brightest fortune in England, or perchance in Europe? Why, man, it was I — as I have often told thee — that found opportunity for their secret meetings. Who carried their letters? I. Who amused the old knight and Tressilian? I. Who planned her escape? It was I. It was I, in short, Dick Varney, who pulled this pretty little daisy from its lowly nook, and placed it in the proudest bonnet in Britain. But, hark — some one knocks at the gate. Look out at the window; let no one enter: this were an ill night to be interrupted."

"It is he whom we spoke of before dinner," said Foster, as he looked through the casement — "it is Michael Lambourne."

"Oh, admit him, by all means," said the courtier; "he comes to give some account of his guest: it imports us much to know the movements of Edmund Tressilian."

CHAPTER V.

FOUR apartments, which occupied the western side of the old quadrangle at Cumnor Place, had been fitted up with extraordinary splendor. Workmen sent from London, and not permitted to leave the premises until the work was finished, had converted the apartments in that side of the building from the dilapidated appearance of a dissolved monastic house into the semblance of a royal palace. A mystery was observed in all these arrangements: the workmen came thither and returned by night, and all measures were taken to prevent the prying curiosity of the villagers. Accordingly, the secrecy desired was so far preserved that nothing got abroad but vague and uncertain reports.

On the evening of which we treat, the new and highly decorated suite of rooms were for the first time illuminated, and that with a brilliancy which might have been visible half a dozen miles off, had not oaken shutters, carefully secured with bolt and padlock, and mantled with long curtains of silk and of velvet, deeply fringed with gold, prevented the slightest gleam of radiance from being seen without.

The principal apartments, as we have seen, were four in number, each opening into the other. Access was given to them by a large scale staircase, of unusual length and height, which had its landing-place at the door of an ante-chamber, shaped somewhat like a gallery. This apartment was beautifully wainscoted with dark foreign wood of a brown color, and bearing a high polish, said to have been brought from the Western Indies, and to have been wrought in London with infinite difficulty, and much damage to the tools of the workmen. The dark color of this finishing was relieved by the number of lights in silver sconces which hung against the walls, and by six large and richly-framed pictures by the first masters of the age. A massy oaken table, placed at the lower end of the apartment, served to accommodate such as chose to play at the then fashionable game of shovel-board; and there was at the other end an elevated gallery for the musicians or minstrels, who might be summoned to increase the festivity of the evening.

From this ante-chamber opened a banqueting-room of moderate size, but brilliant enough to dazzle the eyes of the spectator with the richness of its furniture. The walls, lately so bare and ghastly, were now clothed with hangings of sky-blue velvet and silver; the chairs were of ebony, richly carved, with cushions corresponding to the hangings; and in place of silver sconces there was a huge chandelier of the same precious metal. The floor was covered with a Spanish foot-cloth, or carpet, on which flowers and fruits were represented in such glowing and natural colors that you hesitated to place the foot on such exquisite

workmanship. The table, of old English oak, stood ready covered with the finest linen, and a large portable court-cupboard was placed with the leaves of its embossed folding-doors displayed, showing the shelves within, decorated with a full display of plate and porcelain.

The third apartment was called the withdrawing-room. It was hung with the finest tapestry. The principal seat of this apartment was a chair of state, raised a step or two from the floor, and large enough to contain two persons. It was surmounted by a canopy, which, as well as the cushions, side-curtains, and the very foot-cloth, was composed of crimson velvet, embroidered with seed-pearl. On the top of the canopy were two coronets, resembling those of an earl and countess. Stools covered with velvet, and some cushions disposed in the Moorish fashion, supplied the place of chairs in this apartment, which contained musical instruments, embroidery frames, and other articles for ladies' pastime. Besides lesser lights, the withdrawing-room was illuminated by four tall torches of virgin wax, each of which was placed in the grasp of a statue, representing an armed Moor, who held in his left arm a round buckler of silver, highly polished, interposed betwixt his breast and the light, which was thus brilliantly reflected.

The sleeping-chamber belonging to this splendid suite of apartments was decorated in a taste less showy, but not less rich. Two silver lamps, fed with perfumed oil, diffused at once a delicious odor and a trembling twilight-seeming shimmer through the quiet apartment. It was carpeted so thick that the heaviest step could not have been heard; and the bed, richly heaped with down, was spread with an ample coverlet of silk and gold, from under which peeped forth cambric sheets and blankets as white as the lambs which yielded the fleece that made them. The curtains were of blue velvet, lined with crimson silk, deeply festooned with gold, and embroidered with the loves of Cupid and Psyche. On the toilet was a beautiful Venetian mirror, in a

frame of silver filigree, and beside it stood a gold posset-dish to contain the night-draught. A pair of pistols and a dagger, mounted with gold, were displayed near the head of the bed, being the arms for the night, which were presented to honored guests. In a small recess, illuminated by a taper, were disposed two hassocks of velvet and gold, corresponding with the bed furniture, before a desk of carved ebony. On the desk were two Books of Common Prayer, richly bound and embossed with silver.

The divinity for whose sake this temple had been decorated was well worthy the cost and pains. She was seated in the withdrawing-room, surveying with the pleased eye of natural and innocent vanity the splendor which had been so suddenly created in her honor. For, as her own residence at Cumnor Place formed the cause of the mystery observed in all the preparations for opening these apartments, it was sedulously arranged that, until she took possession of them, she should have no means of knowing what was going forward or of exposing herself to be seen by the workmen engaged in the decorations. She had been, therefore, introduced on that evening to a part of the mansion so different from all the rest that it appeared, in comparison, like an enchanted palace. And when she first examined and occupied these splendid rooms, it was with the wild and unrestrained joy of a rustic beauty, who finds herself suddenly invested with a splendor which her most extravagant wishes had never imagined, and at the same time with the keen feeling of an affectionate heart, which knows that all the enchantment that surrounds her is the work of the great magician Love.

The Countess Amy, therefore — for to that rank she was exalted by her private but solemn union with England's proudest earl — had for a time flitted hastily from room to room, admiring each new proof of her lover and her bridegroom's taste, and feeling that admiration enhanced, as she recollected that all she gazed upon was one continued proof of his ardent and devoted

affection. "How beautiful are these hangings! How natural these paintings, which seem to contend with life! How richly wrought is that plate, which looks as if all the galleons of Spain had been intercepted on the broad seas to furnish it forth! And oh, Janet!" she exclaimed repeatedly, "O, Janet! how much more delightful to think that all these fair things have been assembled by his love, for the love of me! and that this evening — this very evening, which grows darker every instant, I shall thank him more for the love that has created such an unimaginable paradise than for all the wonders it contains."

"The Lord is to be thanked first," said the pretty Puritan, "who gave thee, lady, the kind and courteous husband whose love has done so much for thee. I, too, have done my poor share; but if you thus run wildly from room to room, the toil of my crisping and my curling pins will vanish like the frostwork on the window when the sun is high."

"Thou sayest true, Janet," said the young and beautiful countess, stopping suddenly from her tripping race of enraptured delight, and looking at herself from head to foot in a large mirror, such as she had never before seen, and which, indeed, had few to match it even in the Queen's palace — "thou sayest true, Janet!" she answered as she saw, with pardonable self-applause, the noble mirror reflect such charms as were seldom presented to its fair and polished surface. "Come, Janet, we will practice state — we will go to the withdrawing-room, my good girl, and thou shalt put these rebel locks in order, and imprison within lace and cambric the bosom that beats too high."

They went to the withdrawing apartment accordingly, where the countess playfully stretched herself upon the pile of Moorish cushions, half sitting, half reclining, half wrapt in her own thoughts, half listening to the prattle of her attendant.

While she was in this attitude, and with a corresponding expression betwixt listlessness and expectation on her fine and

intelligent features, you might have searched sea and land without finding anything half so expressive or half so lovely. The wreath of brilliants which mixed with her dark brown hair did not match in lustre the hazel eye which a light brown eyebrow, penciled with exquisite delicacy, and long eyelashes of the same color, relieved and shaded. The exercise she had just taken, her excited expectation and gratified vanity, spread a glow over her fine features. The milk-white pearls of the necklace which she wore, the same which she had just received as a true love token from her husband, were excelled in purity by her teeth, and by the color of her skin, saving where the blush of pleasure and self-satisfaction had somewhat stained the neck with a shade of light crimson. "Now, have done with these busy fingers, Janet," she said to her handmaiden, who was still officiously employed in bringing her hair and her dress into order — "have done, I say; I must see your father ere my lord arrives, and also Master Richard Varney, whom my lord has highly in his esteem — but I could tell that of him would lose him favor."

"O, do not do so, good my lady!" replied Janet: "leave him to God, who punishes the wicked in His own time; but do not you cross Varney's path, for so thoroughly hath he my lord's ear, that few have thriven who have thwarted his courses."

"You are bold, damsel," said the countess, rising from the cushions on which she sate half-reclined in the arms of her attendant. "Call thy father hither, and call Varney also. Call them hither, Janet."

Janet Foster obeyed her mistress; and in a few minutes after, Varney entered the withdrawing-room with the graceful ease and unclouded front of an accomplished courtier, skilled, under the veil of external politeness, to disguise his own feelings, and to penetrate those of others. Anthony Foster plodded into the apartment after him, his natural gloomy vulgarity of aspect seeming to become yet more remarkable from his clumsy attempt to conceal the mixture of anxiety and dislike with which he looked

on her over whom he had hitherto exercised so severe a control, now so splendidly attired, and decked with so many pledges of the interest which she possessed in her husband's affections.

Varney, who, in right of his gentle blood, had pressed into the room before Anthony Foster, knew better what to say than he, and said it with more assurance and a better grace.

The countess greeted him indeed with an appearance of cordiality. She rose from her seat and advanced two steps towards him, holding forth her hand as she said, "Master Richard Varney, you brought me this morning such welcome tidings that I fear surprise and joy made me neglect my lord and husband's charge to receive you with distinction. We offer you our hand, sir, in reconciliation."

"I am unworthy to touch it," said Varney, dropping on one knee, "save as a subject honors that of a prince."

He touched with his lips those fair and slender fingers, so richly loaded with rings and jewels; then rising, with graceful gallantry, was about to hand her to the chair of state, when she said, "No good Master Richard Varney, I take not my place there until my lord himself conducts me. I am for the present but a disguised countess, and will not take dignity on me until authorized by him whom I derive it from."

"I trust, my lady," said Foster, "that in doing the commands of my lord your husband, in your restraint and so forth, I have not incurred your displeasure, seeing that I did but my duty towards your lord and mine."

"I receive at this moment so pleasant a surprise, Master Foster," answered the countess, "that I cannot but excuse the rigid fidelity which secluded me from these apartments until they had assumed an appearance so new and so splendid."

"Ay, lady," said Foster, "it hath cost many a fair crown; and that more need not be wasted than is absolutely necessary, I leave you till my lord's arrival with good Master Richard Varney, who, as I think, hath somewhat to say to you from your most

noble lord and husband. Janet, follow me, to see that all be in order."

"No, Master Foster," said the countess, "we will your daughter remains here in our apartment; out of ear-shot, however, in case Varney hath aught to say to me from my lord."

Foster made his clumsy reverence and departed, with an aspect that seemed to grudge the profuse expense which had been wasted upon changing his house from a bare and ruinous grange to an Asiatic palace. When he was gone, his daughter took her embroidery frame and went to establish herself at the bottom of the apartment, while Richard Varney, with a profoundly humble courtesy, took the lowest stool he could find, and placing it by the side of the pile of cushions on which the countess had now again seated herself, sat with his eyes for a time fixed on the ground, and in profound silence.

"I thought, Master Varney," said the countess, when she saw he was not likely to open the conversation, "that you had something to communicate from my lord and husband; so at least I understood Master Foster."

"Lady," said Varney, "Foster was partly mistaken in my purpose. It was not *from* but *of* your noble husband that I am led, and indeed bound, to speak."

"The theme is most welcome, sir," said the countess, "but be brief, for I expect his hasty approach."

"Briefly then, madam," replied Varney, "and boldly, you have this day seen Tressilian?"

"I have, sir, and what of that?" answered the lady, somewhat sharply.

"Nothing that concerns me, lady," Varney replied with humility. "But, think you, honored madam, that your lord will hear it with equal equanimity?"

"And wherefore should he not? To me alone was Tressilian's visit embarrassing and painful, for he brought news of my good father's illness."

“Of your father’s illness, madam!” answered Varney. “It must have been sudden then — very sudden; for the messenger whom I despatched, at my lord’s instance, found the good knight on the hunting-field, cheering his beagles with his wonted jovial field-cry. I trust Tressilian has but forged this news. He hath his reasons, madam, as you well know, for disquieting your present happiness.”

“You do him injustice, Master Varney,” replied the countess, with animation — “you do him much injustice. He is the freest, the most open, the most gentle heart that breathes. My honorable lord ever excepted, I know not one to whom falsehood is more odious than to Tressilian. For this my father loved him. For this I would have loved him — if I could. And yet in this case he had what seemed to him, unknowing alike of my marriage and to whom I was united, such powerful reasons to withdraw me from this place, that I well trust he exaggerated much of my father’s indisposition, and that thy better news may be the truer.”

“Believe me they are, madam,” answered Varney. “But you must think lower of my head and heart than is due to one whom my noble lord deigns to call his friend, if you suppose I could willfully and unnecessarily palm upon your ladyship a falsehood, so soon to be detected, in a matter which concerns your happiness.”

“Master Varney,” said the countess, “I know that my lord esteems you, and holds you a faithful and good pilot in those seas in which he has spread so high and so venturous a sail. Do not suppose, therefore, I meant hardly by you when I spoke the truth in Tressilian’s vindication. I am, as you well know, country-bred, and like plain rustic truth better than courtly compliment; but I must change my fashions with my sphere, I presume.”

“True, madam,” said Varney smiling. “A court dame — take the most noble, the most virtuous, the most unimpeachable, that stands around our Queen’s throne — would, for exam-

ple, have shunned to speak the truth, or what she thought such, in praise of a discarded suitor, before the dependant and confidant of her noble husband."

"And wherefore," said the countess, coloring impatiently, "should I not do justice to Tressilian's worth before my husband's friend — before my husband himself — before the whole world?"

"And with the same openness," said Varney, "your ladyship will this night tell my noble lord your husband that Tressilian has discovered your place of residence, so anxiously concealed from the world, and that he has had an interview with you?"

"Unquestionably," said the countess. "It will be the first thing I tell him, together with every word that Tressilian said, and that I answered."

"Your ladyship will do your pleasure," answered Varney; "but methinks it were as well, since nothing calls for so frank a disclosure, to spare yourself this pain, and my noble lord the disquiet, and Master Tressilian the danger which is like to ensue."

"I can see nought of all these terrible consequences," said the lady, composedly, "unless by imputing to my noble lord unworthy thoughts, which I am sure never harbored in his generous heart."

"Far be it from me to do so," said Varney. And then, after a moment's silence, he added, with a real or affected plainness of manner very different from his usual smooth courtesy — "Look around you," he said "noble lady, and observe the barriers with which this place is surrounded, the studious mystery with which the brightest jewel that England possesses is secluded from the admiring gaze. See with what rigor your walks are circumscribed, and your movements restrained at the beck of yonder churlish Foster. Consider all this, and judge for yourself what can be the cause."

"My lord's pleasure," answered the countess; "and I am bound to seek no other motive."

"His pleasure it is indeed," said Varney; "and his pleasure arises out of a love worthy of the object which inspires it. But he who possesses a treasure, and who values it, is oft anxious, in proportion to the value he puts upon it, to secure it from the depredations of others."

"What needs all this talk, Master Varney?" said the lady, in reply. "You would have me believe that my noble lord is jealous? Suppose it true, I know a cure for jealousy."

"Indeed, madam!" said Varney.

"It is," replied the lady, "to speak the truth to my lord at all times, to hold up my mind and my thoughts before him as pure as that polished mirror; so that when he looks into my heart he shall only see his own features reflected there. Hark! I hear the trampling of horse. He comes! — he comes!" she exclaimed, jumping up in ecstasy.

"I cannot think it is he," said Varney, "or that you can hear the tread of his horse through the closely mantled casement."

"Stop me not, Varney; my ears are keener than thine — it is he!"

"But madam! — but madam!" exclaimed Varney, anxiously, and still placing himself in her way, "I trust that what I have spoken in humble duty and service will not be turned to my ruin. I implore that ——"

"Content thee, man — content thee!" said the countess, "and quit my skirt; you are too bold to detain me. Content thyself, I think not of thee."

At this moment the folding-doors flew wide open, and a man of majestic mien, muffled in the folds of a long dark riding-cloak, entered the apartment.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE was some little displeasure and confusion on the countess's brow, owing to her struggle with Varney's pertinacity; but it was exchanged for an expression of the purest joy and affection, as she threw herself into the arms of the noble stranger who entered, and clasping him to her bosom, exclaimed, "At length — at length thou art come!"

Varney discreetly withdrew as his lord entered, and Janet was about to do the same, when her mistress signed to her to remain. She took her place at the farther end of the apartment, and continued standing, as if ready for attendance.

Meanwhile the earl, for he was of no inferior rank, returned his lady's caress with the most affectionate ardor, but affected to resist when she strove to take his cloak from him.

"Nay," she said, "but I will unmantle you. I must see if you have kept your word to me, and come as the great earl men call thee, and not as heretofore like a private cavalier."

"Thou art like the rest of the world, Amy," said the earl, suffering her to prevail in the playful contest; "the jewels, and feathers, and silk are more to them than the man whom they adorn: many a poor blade looks gay in a velvet scabbard."

"But so cannot men say of thee, thou noble earl," said his lady, as the cloak dropped on the floor, and showed him dressed as princes when they ride abroad; "thou art the good and well-tried steel. Do not think Amy can love thee better in this glorious garb than she did when she gave her heart to him who wore the russet-brown cloak in the woods of Devon."

"And thou too," said the earl, as gracefully and majestically he led his beautiful countess towards the chair of state which was prepared for them both — "thou too, my love, hast donned a dress which becomes thy rank, though it cannot improve thy beauty. What think'st thou of our court taste?"

The lady cast a sidelong glance upon the great mirror as they passed it by, and then said, "I know not how it is, but I think not of my own person while I look at the reflection of thine. Sit thou there," she said, as they approached the chair of state, "like a thing for men to worship and to wonder at."

"Ay, love," said the earl, "if thou wilt share my state with me."

"Not so," said the countess; "I will sit on this footstool at thy feet, that I may spell over thy splendor, and learn, for the first time, how princes are attired."

And with childish wonder which her youth and rustic education rendered not only excusable but becoming, mixed as it was with a delicate show of the most tender conjugal affection, she examined and admired from head to foot the noble form and princely attire of him who formed the proudest ornament of the court of England's Maiden Queen, renowned as it was for splendid courtiers, as well as for wise counselors. Regarding affectionately his lovely bride, and gratified by her unrepressed admiration, the dark eye and noble features of the earl expressed passions more gentle than the commanding and aspiring look which usually sate upon his broad forehead and in the piercing brilliancy of his dark eye; and he smiled at the simplicity which dictated the questions she put to him concerning the various ornaments with which he was decorated.

"The embroidered strap, as thou callest it, around my knee," he said, "is the English Garter — an ornament which kings are proud to wear. See, here is the star which belongs to it, and here the Diamond George, the jewel of the order."

"But this other fair collar, so richly wrought, with some jewel like a sheep hung by the middle attached to it, what," said the young countess, "does that emblem signify?"

"This collar," said the earl, "is the badge of the noble order of the Golden Fleece, once appertaining to the house of Burgundy. Even the king of Spain himself, who hath now succeeded

to the honors and demesnes of Burgundy, may not sit in judgment upon a knight of the Golden Fleece, unless by assistance and consent of the great chapter of the order."

"And is this an order belonging to the cruel king of Spain?" said the countess. "Alas! my noble lord, that you will defile your noble English breast by bearing such an emblem! And will you, whom men call the standard-bearer of the true Protestant faith, be contented to wear the emblem and mark of such a Romish tyrant as he of Spain?"

"O, content you, my love," answered the earl; "we who spread our sails to gales of court favor cannot always display the ensigns we love the best, or at all times refuse sailing under colors which we like not. Believe me, I am not the less good Protestant that for policy I must accept the honor offered me by Spain, in admitting me to this his highest order of knighthood."

"Nay, my lord, you know your own path best," replied the countess. "And this other collar, to what country does this fair jewel belong?"

"To a very poor one, my love," replied the earl: "this is the order of St. Andrew, revived by the last James of Scotland. It was bestowed on me when it was thought the young widow of France and Scotland would gladly have wedded an English baron; but a free coronet of England is worth a crown matrimonial held at the humor of a woman, and owning only the poor rocks and bogs of the north."

The countess paused, as if what the earl last said had excited some painful but interesting train of thought; and, as she still remained silent, her husband proceeded.

"And now, loveliest, your wish is gratified, and you have seen your vassal in such of his trim array as accords with riding vestments; for robes of state and coronets are only for princely halls."

"Well, then," said the countess, "my gratified wish has, as usual, given rise to a new one."

“ And what is it thou canst ask that I can deny ? ” said the fond husband.

“ I wished to see my earl visit this obscure and secret bower,” said the countess, “ in all his princely array; and now, methinks, I long to sit in one of his princely halls, and see him enter dressed in sober russet, as when he won poor Amy Robsart’s heart.”

“ That is a wish easily granted,” said the earl; “ the sober russet shall be donned to-morrow, if you will.”

“ But shall I,” said the lady, “ go with you to one of your castles, to see how the richness of your dwelling will correspond with your peasant habit ? ”

“ Why, Amy,” said the earl, looking around, “ are not these apartments decorated with sufficient splendor ? I gave the most unbounded order, and, methinks, it has been indifferently well obeyed; but if thou canst tell me aught which remains to be done, I will instantly give direction.”

“ Nay, my lord, now you mock me,” replied the countess; “ the gaiety of this rich lodging exceeds my imagination as much as it does my desert. But shall not your wife, my love — at least one day soon — be surrounded with the honor which is attached to her place among the matronage, as the avowed wife of England’s noblest earl ? ”

“ One day ! ” said her husband. “ Yes, Amy, my love, one day this shall surely happen; and, believe me, thou canst not wish for that day more fondly than I. But, Amy, this cannot yet be; and these dear but stolen interviews are all I can give to the loveliest and the best beloved of her sex.”

“ But *why* can it not be ? ” urged the countess, in the softest tones of persuasion. “ Why can it not immediately take place — this most perfect, this uninterrupted union, for which you say you wish, and which the laws of God and man alike command ? Ah ! did you but desire it half as much as you say, mighty and favored as you are, who or what should bar your attaining your wish ? ”

The earl's brow was overcast.

"Amy," he said, "you speak of what you understand not. We that toil in courts are like those who climb a mountain of loose sand: we dare make no halt until some projecting rock afford us a secure footing and resting-place; if we pause sooner, we slide down by our own weight, an object of universal derision. I stand high, but I stand not secure enough to follow my own inclination. To declare my marriage were to be the artificer of my own ruin. But, believe me, I will reach a point, and that speedily, when I can do justice to thee and to myself. Meantime, poison not the bliss of the present moment by desiring that which cannot at present be. Let me rather know whether all here is managed to thy liking. How does Foster bear himself to you?"

"He reminds me sometimes of the necessity of this privacy," answered the lady, with a sigh; "but that is reminding me of your wishes, and therefore I am rather bound to him than disposed to blame him for it."

"I have told you the stern necessity which is upon us," replied the earl. "Foster is, I note, somewhat sullen of mood. If thou hast aught to complain of the mode in which he discharges his duty, he shall atone for it."

"O, I have naught to complain of," answered the lady, "so he discharges his task with fidelity to you; and his daughter Janet is the kindest and best companion of my solitude, her little air of precision sits so well upon her!"

"Is she indeed?" said the earl; "she who gives you pleasure must not pass unrewarded. Come hither, damsel."

"Janet," said the lady, "come hither to my lord."

Janet came forward, and as she made her reverential courtesy, the earl could not avoid smiling at the contrast which the extreme simplicity of her dress, and the prim demureness of her looks, made with a very pretty countenance and a pair of black eyes, that laughed in spite of their mistress's desire to look grave.

"I am bound to you, pretty damsel," said the earl, "for the contentment which your service hath given to this lady." As he said this, he took from his finger a ring of some price, and offered it to Janet Foster, adding, "Wear this, for her sake and for mine."

"I am well pleased, my lord," answered Janet, demurely, "that my poor service hath gratified my lady, whom no one can draw nigh to without desiring to please; but we of the precious Master Holdforth's congregation seek not, like the gay daughters of this world, to twine gold around our fingers, or wear stones upon our necks, like the vain women of Tyre and of Sidon."

"O, what! you are a grave professor of the precise sisterhood, pretty Mrs. Janet," said the earl, "and I think your father is of the same congregation in sincerity. I like you both the better for it; for I have been prayed for, and wished well to, in your congregations. And you may the better afford the lack of ornament, Mrs. Janet, because your fingers are slender and your neck white. But here is what neither Papist nor Puritan ever boggles or makes mouths at."

So saying, he put into her hand five broad gold pieces of Philip and Mary.

"I would not accept this gold neither," said Janet, "but that I hope to find a use for it which will bring a blessing on us all."

"Even please thyself, pretty Janet," said the earl, "and I shall be well satisfied. And I prithee let them hasten the evening collation."

"I have bidden Master Varney and Master Foster to sup with us, my lord," said the countess, as Janet retired to obey the earl's commands; "has it your approbation?"

"What you do ever must have so, my sweet Amy," replied her husband.

"I had a boon to beg of thee, and a secret to tell thee, my dear lord," said the countess, with a faltering accent.

"Let both be for to-morrow, my love," replied the earl. "I see they open the folding-doors into the banqueting-parlor, and, as I have ridden far and fast, a cup of wine will not be unacceptable."

So saying, he led his lovely wife into the next apartment, where Varney and Foster received them with the deepest reverences. The earl returned their salutation with the negligent courtesy of one long used to such homage; while the countess repaid it with a punctilious solicitude which showed it was not quite so familiar to her.

The banquet at which the company seated themselves corresponded in magnificence with the splendor of the apartment in which it was served up, but no domestic gave his attendance. Janet alone stood ready to wait upon the company; and, indeed, the board was so well supplied with all that could be desired that little or no assistance was necessary. The earl and his lady occupied the upper end of the table, and Varney and Foster sat beneath the salt, as was the custom with inferiors. The latter, overawed perhaps by society to which he was altogether unused, did not utter a single syllable during the repast; while Varney, with great tact and discernment, sustained just so much of the conversation as, without the appearance of intrusion on his part, prevented it from languishing, and maintained the good humor of the earl at the highest pitch. The hour of rest at length arrived, the earl and countess retired to their apartment, and all was silent in the castle for the rest of the night.

Early on the ensuing morning, Varney acted as the earl's chamberlain as well as his master of horse, though the latter was his proper office in that magnificent household, where knights and gentlemen of good descent were well contented to hold such menial situations as nobles themselves held in that of the sovereign.

"Help me to do on a plainer riding-suit, Varney," said the earl, as he laid aside his morning-gown, flowered with silk and lined

with sables, " and put these chains and fetters there (pointing to the collars of the various orders which lay on the table) into their place of security; my neck last night was wellnigh broke with the weight of them. I am half of the mind that they shall gall me no more. They are bonds which knaves have invented to fetter fools. How think'st thou, Varney? "

" Faith, my good lord," said his attendant, " I think fetters of gold are like no other fetters: they are ever the weightier the welcomer."

" For all that, Varney," replied his master, " I am wellnigh resolved they shall bind me to the court no longer. What brought my father to the block, but that he could not bound his wishes within right and reason? I am wellnigh resolved to tempt the sea no farther, but sit me down in quiet on the shore."

" And gather cockle-shells, with Dan Cupid to aid you," said Varney.

" How mean you by that, Varney? " said the earl, somewhat hastily.

" Well, my lord," replied Varney, " we will suppose the step taken. You have retired, we will say, to some one of your most distant castles, so far from court that you hear neither the sorrow of your friends nor the glee of your enemies. We will suppose, too, that your successful rival will be satisfied — a thing greatly to be doubted — with abridging and cutting away the branches of the great tree which so long kept the sun from him, and that he does not insist upon tearing you up by the roots. Well, the late prime favorite of England, who wielded her general's staff and controlled her parliaments, is now a rural baron, hunting, hawking, drinking fat ale with country esquires, and mustering his men at the command of the high sheriff ——"

" Varney, forbear! " said the earl.

" Nay, my lord you must give me leave to conclude my picture. Sussex governs England, the Queen's health fails, the

succession is to be settled — a road is opened to ambition more splendid than ambition ever dreamed of. You hear all this as you sit by the hob, under the shade of your hall chimney. You then begin to think what hopes you have fallen from, and what insignificance you have embraced."

"I say, Varney," said the earl, "no more of this. I subdue my wishes of retirement, not because I am moved by the call of private ambition, but that I may preserve the position in which I may best serve my country at the hour of need. We will to horse ere men are stirring. I will but take leave of my lady, and be ready. I impose a restraint on my own poor heart, and wound one yet more dear to me; but the patriot must subdue the husband."

Having said this in a melancholy but firm accent, he left the dressing-apartment.

"I am glad thou art gone," thought Varney, "or, practised as I am in the follies of mankind, I had laughed in the very face of thee! Thou mayst tire as thou wilt of thy new bauble, thy pretty piece of painted Eve's flesh there, I will not be thy hindrance. But of thine old bauble, ambition, thou shalt not tire, for as you climb the hill, my lord, you must drag Richard Varney up with you; and if he can urge you to the ascent he means to profit by, believe me he will spare neither whip nor spur. And for you, my pretty lady, that would be countess outright, you were best not thwart my courses."

In the meanwhile the earl re-entered the bedchamber, bent on taking a hasty farewell of the lovely countess, and scarce daring to trust himself in private with her, to hear requests again urged which he found it difficult to parry, yet which his recent conversation with his master of horse had determined him not to grant. He found her in a white dressing robe of silk lined with furs, her little feet unstockinged and hastily thrust into slippers, her unbraided hair escaping from under her midnight coif — with little array but her own loveliness, rather augmented than dimin-

ished by the grief which she felt at the approaching moment of separation.

"Now, God be with thee, my dearest and loveliest!" said the earl, scarce tearing himself from her embrace, yet again returning to fold her again and again in his arms, and again bidding farewell, and again returning to kiss and bid adieu once more. "The sun is on the verge of the blue horizon — I dare not stay. Ere this I should have been ten miles from hence."

Such were the words with which at length he strove to cut short their parting interview.

"You will not grant my request, then?" said the countess. "Ah, false knight! did ever lady, with bare foot in slipper, seek boon of a brave knight, yet return with denial?"

"Anything, Amy — anything thou canst ask I will grant," answered the earl; "always excepting," he said, "that which might ruin us both."

"Nay," said the countess, "I urge not my wish to be acknowledged in the character which would make me the envy of England — as the wife, that is, of my brave and noble lord, the first as the most fondly beloved of English nobles. Let me but share the secret with my dear father! Let me but end his misery on my unworthy account; they say he is ill, the good old kind-hearted man!"

"*They* say?" asked the earl, hastily; "who says? Did not Varney convey to Sir Hugh all we dare at present tell him concerning your happiness and welfare? And has he not told you that the good old knight was following, with good heart and health, his favorite and wonted exercise? Who has dared put other thoughts into your head?"

"O, no one, my lord — no one," said the countess, something alarmed at the tone in which the question was put; "but yet, my lord, I would fain be assured by mine own eyesight that my father is well."

"Be contented, Amy; thou canst not now have communication

with thy father or his house. It were sufficient reason for secrecy that yonder Cornishman — yonder Trevanion, or Tressilian, or whatever his name is — haunts the old knight's house, and must necessarily know whatever is communicated there."

"My lord," answered the countess, "I do not think it so. My father has been long noted a worthy and honorable man; and for Tressilian, if we can pardon ourselves the ill we have wrought him, I will wager the coronet I am to share with you one day that he is incapable of returning injury for injury."

"I will not trust him, however, Amy," said her husband — "by my honor, I will not trust him. I would rather the foul fiend intermingle in our secret than this Tressilian!"

"And why, my lord?" said the countess, though she shuddered slightly at the tone of determination in which he spoke; "let me but know why you think thus hardly of Tressilian?"

"Madam," replied the earl, "my will ought to be a sufficient reason. If you desire more, consider how this Tressilian is leagued, and with whom. He stands high in the opinion of this Ratcliffe, this Sussex, against whom I am barely able to maintain my ground in the opinion of our suspicious mistress; and if he had me at such advantage, Amy, as to become acquainted with the tale of our marriage before Elizabeth were fitly prepared, I were outcast from her grace forever — a victim, and it may be a bloody one, to her offended and jealous resentment."

"But why, my lord," again urged his lady, "should you deem thus injuriously of a man of whom you know so little? What you do know of Tressilian is through me, and it is I who assure you that in no circumstances will he betray your secret. You are offended at my speaking of him; what would you say had I actually myself seen him?"

"If you had," replied the earl, "you would do well to keep that interview as secret as that which is spoken in a confessional. I seek no one's ruin; but he who thrusts himself on my secret

privacy were better look well to his future walk. The bear¹ brooks no one to cross his awful path."

"Awful, indeed!" said the countess, turning very pale.

"You are ill, my love," said the earl, supporting her in his arms; "stretch yourself on your couch again; it is but early day for you to leave it. Have you aught else, involving less than my fame, my fortune, and my life to ask of me?"

"Nothing, my lord and love," answered the countess, faintly; "something there was that I would have told you, but your anger has driven it from my recollection."

"Reserve it till our next meeting, my love," said the earl fondly, and again embracing her; "and barring only those requests which I cannot and dare not grant, thy wish must be more than England and all its dependencies can fulfil if it is not gratified to the letter."

Thus saying, he at length took farewell. At the bottom of the staircase he received from Varney an ample livery cloak and slouched hat, in which he wrapped himself so as to disguise his person and completely conceal his features. Horses were ready in the courtyard for himself and Varney; for one or two of his train, had already been dismissed over night. While his stately form vanished under the dark archway, which led out of the quadrangle, Varney seized the moment to speak a word with Foster. "See here!" said he, "a purse of as good gold as ever chinked under a miser's thumb and forefinger. Follow my counsel, and Cumnor Place shall be thy copyhold yet. Say nothing of this Tressilian's visit — not a word until I give thee notice."

"And wherefore, I pray you?" asked Foster, suspiciously.

"Dull beast!" replied Varney; "in my lord's present humor it were the ready way to confirm him in his resolution of retire-

¹ An allusion to the device of a bear and ragged staff in the Leicester coat of arms.

ment. He would be for playing the dragon himself over his golden fruit, and then, Tony, thy occupation is ended. A word to the wise. Farewell — I must follow him."

He turned his horse, struck him with the spurs, and rode off under the archway in pursuit of his lord.

"Would thy occupation were ended, or thy neck broken," said Anthony Foster. "But I must follow his beck, for his interest and mine are the same, and he can wind the proud earl to his will. Janet shall give me those pieces, though; they shall be laid out in some way for God's service, and I will keep them separate in my strong chest till I can fall upon a fitting employment for them. No contagious vapor shall breathe on Janet: she shall remain pure as a blessed spirit, were it but to pray God for her father. I need her prayers, for I am at a hard pass."

Varney, meantime, spurred after his lord, whom he found waiting for him at the postern gate of the park.

"You waste time, Varney," said the earl, "and it presses. I must be at Woodstock before I can safely lay aside my disguise, and till then I journey in some peril."

"It is but two hours' brisk riding, my lord," said Varney; "for me, I only stopped to enforce your commands of care and secrecy on yonder Foster, and to inquire about the abode of the gentleman whom I would promote to your lordship's train in the room of Trevors."

"Is he fit for the meridian of the ante-chamber, think'st thou?" said the earl.

"He promises well, my lord," replied Varney; "but if your lordship were pleased to ride on, I could go back to Cumnor, and bring him to your lordship at Woodstock before you are out of bed."

"Why, I am asleep there, thou knowest, at this moment," said the earl; "and I pray you not to spare horseflesh, that you may be with me at my levee."

So saying, he gave his horse the spur, and proceeded on his journey, while Varney rode back to Cumnor by the public road, avoiding the park. The latter alighted at the door of the bonny Black Bear, and desired to speak with Master Michael Lambourne. That respectable character was not long of appearing before his new patron, but it was with downcast looks.

"Thou hast lost the scent," said Varney, "of thy comrade Tressilian. I know it by thy hangdog visage. Is this thy alacrity, thou impudent knave?"

"Cog's wounds!" said Lambourne, "there was never a trail so finely hunted. I saw him to earth at mine uncle's here — stuck to him like beeswax — saw him at supper — watched him to his chamber, and presto — he is gone next morning, the very hostler knows not where!"

"This sounds like practice upon me, sir," replied Varney; "and if it prove so, you shall repent it!"

"Sir, the best hound will sometimes be at fault," answered Lambourne. "You may ask mine host, Giles Gosling how I kept eyes on Tressilian while he was on foot."

Varney did, in fact, make some inquiry among the household, which confirmed the truth of Lambourne's statement. Tressilian, it was unanimously agreed, had departed suddenly and unexpectedly, betwixt night and morning.

Thus satisfied of the rectitude of Lambourne's conduct, Varney began to talk to him upon his future prospects.

"Have you," said he, "ever been at court?"

"No," replied Lambourne; "but ever since I was ten years old I have dreamt once a week that I was there."

"It may be your own fault if your dream comes not true," said Varney. "Are you needy?"

"Um!" replied Lambourne; "I love pleasure."

"That is a sufficient answer, and an honest one," said Varney. "Know you aught of the requisites expected from the retainer of a rising courtier?"

"I have imagined them to myself, sir," answered Lambourne; "as, for example, a quick eye, a close mouth, a ready and bold hand, a sharp wit, and a blunt conscience."

"And thine, I suppose," said Varney, "has had its edge blunted long since?"

"I cannot remember, sir, that its edge was ever over keen," replied Lambourne. "When I was a youth, I had some few whimsies, but I rubbed them partly out of my recollection on the rough grindstone of the wars, and what remained I washed out in the broad waves of the Atlantic."

"Thou mayst do me and my lord, and thyself, good service," said Varney after a pause. "But answer me truly, canst thou be faithful?"

"As it seems to me that your worship is one who desires rather honest truth than politic falsehood, I reply to you that I can be faithful to the gallows' foot, ay, to the loop that dangles from it, if I am well used and well recompensed — not otherwise."

"To thy other virtues thou canst add, no doubt," said Varney, in a jeering tone, "the knack of seeming serious and religious, when the moment demands it?"

"It would cost me nothing," said Lambourne, "to say 'yes,' but to speak on the square I must needs say 'no.' If you want a hypocrite, you may take Anthony Foster."

"Well," replied Varney, "if thou hast no hypocrisy, hast thou not a nag here in the stable?"

"Ay, sir," said Lambourne, "that shall take hedge and ditch with my lord's best hunters."

"Saddle him then, instantly, and attend me," said Varney. "Leave thy clothes and baggage under charge of mine host, and I will conduct thee to a service in which, if thou do not better thyself, the fault shall not be fortune's, but thine own."

The master of the horse and his new retainer set off together at a rapid pace, which prevented conversation until the ascent of a steep sandy hill permitted them to resume it.

“ You are contented, then,” said Varney to his companion, “ to take court service ? ”

“ Ay, worshipful sir, if you like my terms as well as I like yours.”

“ And what are your terms ? ” demanded Varney.

“ If I am to have a quick eye for my patron’s interest, he must have a dull one towards my faults,” said Lambourne.”

“ Thou art a shrewd knave, I see,” replied Varney. “ Mark me — I do indeed propose to introduce thee into a nobleman’s household ; but it is upon my person thou wilt chiefly wait, and upon my countenance that thou wilt depend. I am his master of horse. Thou wilt soon know his name ; it is one that shakes the council and wields the state.”

“ Enough said,” replied Lambourne ; “ I will not exceed my limits.”

The travelers then resumed the rapid rate of traveling which their discourse had interrupted, and soon arrived at the royal park of Woodstock. It was, in Elizabeth’s time, an ancient mansion in bad repair, which had long ceased to be honored with the royal residence, to the great impoverishment of the adjacent village. The inhabitants, however, had made several petitions to the Queen to have the favor of the sovereign’s countenance occasionally bestowed upon them ; and upon this very business, ostensibly at least, was the noble lord whom we have already introduced to our readers a visitor at Woodstock.

Varney and Lambourne galloped without ceremony into the courtyard of the ancient and dilapidated mansion. Officers of the earl’s household, livery-men and retainers, went and came with all the insolent fracas which attaches to their profession. The neigh of horses and the baying of hounds were heard ; for my lord was of course provided with the means of following his pleasure in the chase or park, said to have been the earliest that was inclosed in England, and which was well stocked with deer that had long roamed there unmolested. Several of the inhab-

itants of the village, in anxious hope of a favorable result from this unwonted visit, loitered about the courtyard, and awaited the great man's coming forth. Their attention was excited by the hasty arrival of Varney, and a murmur ran amongst them, "The earl's master of the horse!" while they hurried to bespeak favor by hastily unbonneting and proffering to hold the bridle and stirrup of the favored retainer and his attendant.

"Stand somewhat aloof, my masters!" said Varney, haughtily, "and let the domestics do their office."

The mortified citizens and peasants fell back at the signal; while Lambourne, who had his eye upon his superior's deportment, repelled the services of those who offered to assist him with yet more discourtesy — "Stand back, Jack peasant, and let these knave footmen do their duty!"

While they gave their nags to the attendants of the household, and walked into the mansion with an air of superiority which long practice and consciousness of birth rendered natural to Varney, and which Lambourne endeavored to imitate as well as he could, the poor inhabitants of Woodstock whispered to each other, "Well-a-day — God save us! An the master be like the men, why, the fiend may take all, and yet have no more than his due."

Meanwhile, Varney, closely followed by his new dependant, made his way to the hall, where men of more note and consequence than those left in the courtyard awaited the appearance of the earl, who as yet kept his chamber. All paid court to Varney, with more or less deference, as suited their own rank, or the urgency of the business which brought them to his lord's levee. To the general question of, "When comes my lord forth, Master Varney?" he gave brief answers, as, "See you not my boots? I am but just returned from Oxford, and know nothing of it," and the like, until the same query was put in a higher tone by a personage of more importance. "I will inquire of the chamberlain, Sir Thomas Copely," was the reply. The

chamberlain, distinguished by his silver key, answered, that the earl only awaited Master Varney's return to come down, but that he would first speak with him in his private chamber. Varney, therefore, bowed to the company, and took leave, to enter his lord's apartment.

There was a murmur of expectation which lasted a few minutes, and was at length hushed by the opening of the folding-doors at the upper end of the apartment, through which the earl made his entrance, marshalled by his chamberlain and the steward of his family, and followed by Richard Varney. In his noble mien and princely features men read nothing of that insolence which was practised by his dependants. His courtesies were, indeed, measured by the rank of those to whom they were addressed, but even the meanest person present had a share of his gracious notice. The inquiries which he made respecting the condition of the manor, of the Queen's rights there, and of the advantages and disadvantages which might attend her occasional residence at the royal seat of Woodstock, seemed to show that he had most earnestly investigated the matter of the petition of the inhabitants, and with a desire to forward the interest of the place.

The earl then acquainted them that he should move their sovereign to honor Woodstock occasionally with her residence during her royal progresses. Meanwhile, he rejoiced to be the expounder of her gracious pleasure, in assuring them that, for the increase of trade and encouragement of the worthy burgesses of Woodstock, her Majesty was minded to erect the town into a staple¹ for wool.

This joyful intelligence was received with the acclamations not only of the better sort who were admitted to the audience-chamber, but of the commons who awaited without.

The earl and his retinue took horse soon after to return to

¹ Market place.

court, accompanied by the shouts of the inhabitants of Woodstock, who made the old oaks ring with re-echoing, " Long live Queen Elizabeth and the noble Earl of Leicester! "

The urbanity and courtesy of the earl even threw a gleam of popularity over his attendants, as their haughty deportment had formerly obscured that of their master; and men shouted, " Long life to the earl and to his gallant followers! " as Varney and Lambourne, each in his rank, rode proudly through the streets of Woodstock.

CHAPTER VII.

As it was deemed proper by Tressilian that he should avoid being seen in the neighborhood of Cumnor, the landlord had given him a route, consisting of various bye-ways and lanes, which was to conduct him to the public road to Marlborough.

But like counsel of every other kind, this species of direction is much more easily given than followed; and what betwixt the intricacy of the way, Tressilian's ignorance of the country, and the sad and perplexing thoughts with which he had to contend, his journey proceeded so slowly that morning found him only in the Vale of Whitehorse, memorable for the defeat of the Danes in former days, with his horse deprived of a forefoot shoe — an accident which threatened to put a stop to his journey by laming the animal. Anxious that the partner of his journey should suffer as little as possible from the unfortunate accident, Tressilian dismounted, and led his horse in the direction of a little hamlet, where he hoped either to find or hear tidings of a smith. Through a deep and muddy lane, he at length waded on to the place, which proved only an assemblage of five or six miserable huts. One cottage, however, seemed of rather superior aspect, and the old dame, who was sweeping her threshold, appeared something less rude than her neighbors. To her Tressilian

addressed the question, whether there was a smith in this neighborhood, or any place where he could refresh his horse ?

The dame looked him in the face with a peculiar expression, as she replied, " Smith! ay, truly is there a smith; what wouldst ha' wi' un, mon ? "

" To shoe my horse, good dame," answered Tressilian.

" Master Holiday! " exclaimed the dame, without returning any direct answer — " Master Herasmus Holiday, come and speak to mon, and please you. "

" I cannot now come forth, Gammer Sludge," answered a voice from within; " being in the very sweetest bit of my morning studies. "

" Nay, but, good now, Master Holiday, come ye out, do ye. Here's a mon would to Wayland Smith, and I care not to show him way to devil; his horse hath cast shoe. "

Forth came the honest pedagogue, for such his dress bespoke him. A long, lean, shambling, stooping figure was surmounted by a head thatched with lank black hair somewhat inclining to grey. A black buckram cassock was gathered at his middle with a belt, at which hung, instead of knife or weapon, a goodly leathern pen-and-ink-case. His ferula was stuck on the other side, and he carried in his hand the tattered volume which he had been busily perusing.

On seeing a person of Tressilian's appearance, which he was better able to estimate than the country folks had been, the schoolmaster unbonneted, and accosted him with, "*Salve, domine. Intelligisne linguam Latinam ?*"¹

Tressilian mustered his learning sufficiently to answer that he would prefer to speak in the vernacular.

The Latin reply had upon the schoolmaster the effect which the mason's sign is said to produce on the brethren of the trowel. He was at once interested in the learned traveler, listened with

¹ Hail, good sir. Do you understand the Latin language?

gravity to his story of a tired horse and a lost shoe, and then replied with solemnity, "It may appear a simple thing, most worshipful, to reply to you that there dwells, within a brief mile the most accomplished blacksmith, that ever nailed iron upon horse."

"I should at least," said Tressilian, "have a direct answer to a plain question, which seems difficult to be obtained in this country."

"It is a mere sending of a sinful soul to the evil un," said the old woman, "the sending of a living creature to Wayland Smith."

"Peace, Gammer Sludge!" said the pedagogue. Then turning to Tressilian, he resumed his lofty tone, "And so, most worshipful, you would really think yourself *felix bis terque*¹ should I point out to you the dwelling of this same smith?"

"Sir," replied Tressilian, "I should in that case have all that I want at present, excepting a place where I can have opportunity to refresh my horse, until I can have him shod?"

"Thus much courtesy, sir," said the schoolmaster, "I can readily render you. I will use my interest with the good woman of the house to accommodate you with a platter of furmity² — an wholesome food for which I have found no Latin phrase — and your horse shall have a share of the cow-house, with a bottle of sweet hay."

Considering the state of his horse, Tressilian saw no better course than to accept the invitation and take chance that he could find the smith they spoke of. He entered the hut accordingly, and sat down with the learned Magister Erasmus Holiday, partook of his furmity, and listened to his learned account of himself for a good half-hour, ere he could get him to talk upon any other topic.

"Long may you enjoy your learning, sir," at length inter-

¹ Twice and thrice happy.

² Hulled wheat boiled in milk.

rupted the traveler; "but permit me to ask, what has all this to do with the shoeing of my poor nag?"

"*Festina lente*,"¹ said the man of learning, "we will presently come to that point. You must know that, some two or three years past, there came to these parts one who called himself Doctor Doboobie. He was what the vulgar call a white witch, a cunning man, and such-like. He cured wounds by salving the weapon instead of the sore, told fortunes by palmistry, and affected to convert good lead into sorry silver."

"In other words," said Tressilian, "he was a quacksalver and common cheat; but what has all this to do with my nag and the shoe which he has lost?"

"With your worshipful patience," replied the diffusive man of letters, "you shall understand that presently. This same Demetrius Doboobie, after dealing with the country, as I have told you, began to acquire fame among the prime men of the land, and there is likelihood he might have aspired to great matters, had not, according to vulgar fame, the devil claimed his right one dark night, and flown off with Demetrius, who was never seen or heard of afterwards. Now here comes the *medulla*, the very marrow, of my tale. This Doctor Doboobie had a servant, a poor snake, whom he employed in trimming his furnace, regulating it by just measure, compounding his drugs, tracing his circles, and cajoling his patients. Well, right worshipful, the doctor being removed thus strangely, and in a way which struck the whole country with terror, so doth this Wayland assume the dangerous trade of his defunct master. But, the evil reputation of the master, and his strange and doubtful end, or at least sudden disappearance, prevented any, excepting the most desperate of men, to seek any advice or opinion from the servant; wherefore, the poor vermin was likely at first to perish for very

¹ Hasten slowly.

hunger. But the devil that serves him, since the death of Demetrius or Doboobie, put him on a fresh device. He gives up his practice on the bipeds, the two-legged species called mankind, and betakes him entirely to shoeing of horses."

"Indeed! and where does he lodge all this time?" said Tressilian. "And does he shoe horses well? Show me his dwelling presently."

The interruption pleased not the magister, who exclaimed, "Hear but, I pray you, the conditions of this man, ere you are so willing to place yourself within his danger. This Wayland takes no money, indeed, nor doth he show himself to any one. Assuredly there is little wisdom in receiving aid from one who is but too plainly in league with the author of evil."

"I must take my chance of that, good Master Holiday," said Tressilian, rising; "and as my horse must now have eaten his provender, I must needs thank you for your good cheer, and pray you to show me this man's residence, that I may have the means of proceeding on my journey."

"Ay — ay, do ye show him, Master Herasmus," said Gammer Sludge, who was, perhaps, desirous to get her house freed of her guest; "a' must needs go when the devil drives."

"I will rather send my pupil," said Master Holiday.

"Under your favor, not so," answered the old woman; "my son shall budge on no such errand; and I wonder at you, Dominie Doctor, to propose such a piece of service for little Dickie."

"Nay, my good Gammer Sludge," answered the preceptor, "Ricardus shall go but to the top of the hill, and indicate with his digit to the stranger the dwelling of Wayland Smith. Believe not that any evil can come to him, he having read this morning, fasting, a chapter of the Septuagint, and, moreover, having had his lesson in the Greek Testament."

"Ay," said his mother, "and I have sewn a sprig of witch's elm in the neck of un's doublet, ever since that foul thief has begun his practices on man and beast in these parts."

"And as he goes oft, as I hugely suspect, towards this conjurer for his own pastime, he may for once go thither, or near it, to pleasure us, and to assist this stranger. *Ergo, heus, Ricarde!*"¹

The pupil, thus invoked, at length came stumbling into the room — a queer, shambling, ill-made urchin, who, by his stunted growth, seemed about twelve or thirteen years old, though he was probably, in reality, a year or two older, with a carrotty pate in huge disorder, a freckled, sunburnt visage, with a snub nose, a long chin, and two peery gray eyes, which had a droll obliquity of vision, approaching to a squint. It was impossible to look at the little man without some disposition to laugh, especially when Gammer Sludge, seizing upon and kissing him, in spite of his struggling and kicking in reply to her caresses, termed him her own precious pearl of beauty.

"*Ricarde*," said the preceptor, "you must forthwith, which is *profecto*, set forth so far as the top of the hill, and show this man of worship Wayland Smith's workshop."

"A proper errand of a morning," said the boy, in better language than Tressilian expected, "and who knows but the devil may fly away with me before I come back?"

"My good boy," said Tressilian, who saw, from a grotesque sneer on Dickie's face, that he was more likely to act upon his own bottom than by the instruction of his elders, "I will give thee a silver groat, my pretty fellow, if you will but guide me to this man's forge."

The boy gave him a knowing side-look, which seemed to promise acquiescence, while at the same time he exclaimed, "I be your guide to Wayland Smith's! Why, man, did I not say that the devil might fly off with me, just as the kite there (looking to the window) is flying off with one of grandame's chicks?"

"The kite! — the kite!" exclaimed the old woman in return;

¹ Therefore, ho, there, Richard!

and forgetting all other matters in her alarm, hastened to the rescue of her chicken as fast as her old legs could carry her.

"Now for it," said the urchin to Tressilian; "snatch your beaver, get out your horse, and have at the silver groat you spoke of."

Dickie hastily bolted from the cottage, and sped him to the top of a neighboring rising-ground, where he kept frisking like a goblin by moonlight, making signs to his new acquaintance, Tressilian, to follow him.

The traveler lost no time in getting out his horse, and departing to join his elvish guide, after half forcing on the poor deserted teacher a recompense for the entertainment he had received, which partly allayed the terror he had for facing the return of the old lady of the mansion.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ARE we far from the dwelling of this smith, my pretty lad?" said Tressilian to his young guide.

"How is it you call me?" said the boy, looking askew at him with his sharp grey eyes.

"I call you my pretty lad — is there any offence in that, my boy?"

"No, but were you with my grandame and Dominie Holiday, you might sing chorus to the old song of

We three
Tom-fools be."

"And why so, my little man?" said Tressilian.

"Because," answered the ugly urchin, "you are the only three ever called me pretty lad. Now my grandame does it because she is parcel blind by age, and whole blind by kindred; and my master, the poor dominie, does it to curry favor, and have the

fullest platter of furnity, and the warmest seat by the fire. But what *you* call me pretty lad for, you know best yourself."

"Thou art a sharp wag at least, if not a pretty one. But what do thy playfellows call thee?"

"Hobgoblin," answered the boy, readily.

"Then you fear not this smith, whom you are going to see?"

"Me fear him!" answered the boy; "if he were the devil folk think him, I would not fear him; but though there is something queer about him, he's no more a devil than you are, and that's what I would not tell to every one."

"And why do you tell it to me, then, my boy?" said Tressilian.

"Because you are another-guess gentleman than those we see here every day," replied Dickie; "and though I am as ugly as sin, I would not have you think me an ass, especially as I may have a boon to ask of you one day."

"And what is that, my lad?"

"O, if I were to ask it just now," said the boy, "you would deny it me; but I will wait till we meet at court."

"At court, Richard! are you bound for court?" said Tressilian.

"Ay — ay, that's just like the rest of them," replied the boy; "I warrant me you think, what should such an ill-favored, scrambling urchin do at court? But let Richard Sludge alone. I will make sharp wit mend foul feature."

"But what will your grandame say, and your tutor, Dominie Holiday?"

"E'en what they like," replied Dickie; "the one has her chickens to reckon, and the other has his boys to whip. I would have given them the candle to hold long since, and shown this trumpery hamlet a fair pair of heels, but that dominie promises I should go with him to bear share in the next pageant he is to set forth, and they say there are to be great revels shortly."

"And whereabouts are they to be held, my little friend?" said Tressilian.

"O, at some castle far in the north," answered his guide — "a world's breadth from Berkshire. But our old dominie holds that they cannot go forward without him; and it may be he is right, for he has put in order many a fair pageant. He is not half the fool you would take him for, when he gets to work he understands."

"And you are to play a part in his next show?" said Tressilian, somewhat interested by the boy's boldness of conversation and shrewd estimate of character.

"In faith," said Richard Sludge, in answer, "he hath so promised me; and if he break his word it will be the worse for him. And I should not like much to hurt him neither, for the tiresome old fool has painfully labored to teach me all he could. But enough of that; here are we at Wayland Smith's forge door."

"You jest, my little friend," said Tressilian; "here is nothing but a bare moor, and that ring of stones, with a great one in the midst, like a Cornish barrow."

"Ay, and that great flat stone in the midst, which lies across the top of these uprights," said the boy, "is Wayland Smith's counter, that you must tell down your money upon."

"What do you mean by such folly?" said the traveler, beginning to be angry with the boy, and vexed with himself for having trusted such a hare-brained guide.

"Why," said Dickie, with a grin, "you must tie your horse to that upright stone that has the ring in't, and then you must whistle three times, and lay me down your silver groat on that other flat stone, walk out of the circle, sit down on the west side of that little thicket of bushes, and take heed you look neither to right nor to left for ten minutes, or so long as you shall hear the hammer clink, and whenever it ceases say your prayers for the space you could tell a hundred, or count over a hundred, which will do as well, and then come into the circle; you will find your money gone and your horse shod."

"My money gone to a certainty!" said Tressilian; "but as

for the rest — Hark ye, my lad, I am not your schoolmaster; but if you play off your waggery on me, I will take a part of his task off his hands, and punish you to purpose."

"Ay, when you can catch me!" said the boy; and presently took to his heels across the heath, with a velocity which baffled every attempt of Tressilian to overtake him, loaded as he was with his heavy boots. Nor was it the least provoking part of the urchin's conduct that he did not exert his utmost speed, like one who finds himself in danger or who is frightened, but preserved just such a rate as to encourage Tressilian to continue the chase, and then darted away from him with the swiftness of the wind, when his pursuer supposed he had nearly run him down, doubling at the same time, and winding, so as always to keep near the place from which he started.

This lasted until Tressilian, from very weariness, stood still, and was about to abandon the pursuit with a hearty curse on the ill-favored urchin. But the boy, who had, as formerly, planted himself on the top of a hillock close in front, began to clap his long thin hands, point with his skinny fingers, and twist his wild and ugly features into such an extravagant expression of laughter and derision, that Tressilian began half to doubt whether he had not in view an actual hobgoblin.

Provoked extremely, yet at the same time feeling an irresistible desire to laugh, the Cornishman returned to his horse, and mounted him with the purpose of pursuing Dickie at more advantage.

The boy no sooner saw him mount his horse than he hallooed out to him that, rather than he should spoil his white-footed nag, he would come to him, on condition he would keep his fingers to himself.

"I will make no conditions with thee, thou ugly varlet!" said Tressilian; "I will have thee at my mercy in a moment."

"Aha, Master Traveler," said the boy, "there is a marsh hard by would swallow all the horses of the Queen's Guard; I will into

it, and see where you will go then. You shall hear the bittern bump and the wild drake quack ere you get hold of me without my consent, I promise you."

Tressilian looked out, and, from the appearance of the ground behind the hillock, believed it might be as the boy said, and accordingly determined to strike up a peace with so light-footed and ready-witted an enemy. "Come down," he said, "thou mischievous brat! Leave they mopping and mowing, and come hither; I will do thee no harm, as I am a gentleman."

The boy answered his invitation with the utmost confidence, keeping his eye at the same time fixed on Tressilian's, who, once more dismounted, stood with his horse's bridle in his hand, breathless and half exhausted with his fruitless exercise.

"And tell me," said Tressilian, "why you use me thus? Or rather show me, in good earnest, this smith's forge, and I will give thee what will buy thee apples through the whole winter."

"Were you to give me an orchard of apples," said Dickie Sludge, "I can guide thee no better than I have done. Lay down the silver token on the flat stone, whistle three times; then come sit down on the western side of the thicket of gorse. I will sit by you, and give you free leave to wring my head off, unless you hear the smith at work within two minutes after we are seated."

"I may be tempted to take thee at thy word," said Tressilian; "however, I will prove your spell. Here, then, I tie my horse to this upright stone. I must lay my silver groat here, and whistle three times, sayst thou?"

"Ay, but thou must whistle louder than an unfledged ouzel," said the boy, as Tressilian, having laid down his money, and half-ashamed of the folly he practiced, made a careless whistle. "You must whistle louder than that, for who knows where the smith is that you call for? He may be in the King of France's stables for what I know."

"Why, you said but now he was no devil," replied Tressilian.

"Man or devil," said Dickie, "I see that I must summon him for you;" and therewithal he whistled sharp and shrill, with an acuteness of sound that almost thrilled through Tressilian's brain. "That is what I call whistling," said he, after he had repeated the signal thrice; "and now to cover — to cover, or Whitefoot will not be shod this day."

Tressilian, musing what the upshot of this mummery was to be, suffered himself to be conducted to that side of the little thicket of gorse and brushwood which was farthest from the circle of stones, and there sat down; and, as it occurred to him that, after all, this might be a trick for stealing his horse, he kept his hand on the boy's collar, determined to make him hostage for its safety.

"Now, hush and listen," said Dickie, in a low whisper; "you will soon hear the tack of a hammer that was never forged of earthly iron, for the stone it was made of was shot from the moon." And in effect Tressilian did immediately hear the light stroke of a hammer, as when a farrier is at work. The singularity of such a sound, in so very lonely a place, made him involuntarily start; but looking at the boy, and discovering, by the arch, malicious expression of his countenance, that the urchin saw and enjoyed his slight tremor, he became convinced that the whole was a concerted stratagem, and determined to know by whom, or for what purpose, the trick was played off.

Accordingly, he remained perfectly quiet all the time that the hammer continued to sound, being about the space usually employed in fixing a horseshoe. But the instant the sound ceased, Tressilian started up with his sword in his hand, ran round the thicket, and confronted a man in a farrier's leathern apron, but otherwise fantastically attired in a bear-skin dressed with the fur on, and a cap of the same, which almost hid the sooty and begrimed features of the wearer. "Come back — come back!" cried the boy to Tressilian, "or you will be torn

to pieces — no man lives that looks on him." In fact, the invisible smith (now fully visible) heaved up his hammer, and showed symptoms of doing battle.

But when the boy observed that neither his own entreaties nor the menaces of the farrier appeared to change Tressilian's purpose, but that, on the contrary, he confronted the hammer with his drawn sword, he exclaimed to the smith in turn, "Wayland, touch him not, or you will come by the worse! the gentleman is a true gentleman, and a bold."

"So thou hast betrayed me, Flibbertigibbet?" said the smith; "it shall be the worse for thee!"

"Be who thou wilt," said Tressilian, "thou art in no danger from me, so thou tell me the meaning of this practice, and why thou drivest thy trade in this mysterious fashion."

The smith, however, turning to Tressilian, exclaimed, in a threatening tone, "Who questions the Keeper of the Crystal Castle of Light, the Lord of the Green Lion, the Rider of the Red Dragon? Hence! avoid thee, ere I summon Talpack with his fiery lance to quell, crush, and consume!" These words he uttered with violent gesticulation, mouthing and flourishing his hammer.

"Peace, with thy gipsy cant!" replied Tressilian, scornfully, "and follow me to the next magistrate, or I will cut thee over the pate."

"Peace, I pray thee, good Wayland!" said the boy; "credit me, the swaggering vein will not pass here."

"I think, worshipful sir," said the smith, sinking his hammer, and assuming a more gentle and submissive tone of voice, "that when so poor a man does his day's job, he might be permitted to work it out after his own fashion. Your horse is shod, and your farrier paid. What need you cumber yourself further than to mount and pursue your journey?"

"Nay, friend, you are mistaken," replied Tressilian; "every man has a right to take the mask from the face of a cheat and

a juggler; and your mode of living raises suspicion that you are both."

"If you are so determined, sir," said the smith, "I cannot help myself save by force, which I were unwilling to use towards you, Master Tressilian; not that I fear your weapon, but because I know you to be a worthy, kind, and well-accomplished gentleman, who would rather help than harm a poor man that is in a strait."

"Well said, Wayland," said the boy, who had anxiously awaited the issue of their conference. "But let us to thy den, man, for it is ill for thy health to stand here talking in the open air."

"Thou art right, Hobgoblin," replied the smith; and going to the little thicket of gorse on the side nearest to the circle, and opposite to that at which his customer had so lately couched, he discovered a trapdoor curiously covered with bushes, raised it, and, descending into the earth, vanished from their eyes. Notwithstanding Tressilian's curiosity, he had some hesitation at following the fellow into what might be a den of robbers, especially when he heard the smith's voice, issuing from the bowels of the earth, call out, "Flibbertigibbet, do thou come last, and be sure to fasten the trap!"

CHAPTER IX.

"HAVE you seen enough of Wayland Smith now?" whispered the urchin to Tressilian, with an arch sneer, as if marking his companion's uncertainty.

"Not yet," said Tressilian, firmly; and shaking off his momentary irresolution, he descended into the narrow staircase to which the entrance led, and was followed by Dickie Sludge; who made fast the trapdoor behind him, and thus excluded every glimmer of daylight. The descent, however, was only a few

steps, and led to a level passage of a few yards' length, at the end of which appeared the reflection of a lurid and red light. Arrived at this point, with his drawn sword in his hand, Tressilian found that a turn to the left admitted him and Hobgoblin, who followed closely, into a small square vault containing a smith's forge glowing with charcoal, the vapor of which filled the apartment with an oppressive smell, which would have been altogether suffocating, but that by some concealed vent the smithy communicated with the upper air. The light afforded by the red fuel, and by a lamp suspended in an iron chain, served to show that, besides an anvil, bellows, tongs, hammers, a quantity of ready-made horseshoes, and other articles proper to the profession of a farrier, there were also stoves, alembics, crucibles, retorts, and other instruments of alchemy.

Nature had endowed Tressilian with firm nerves, and after giving a glance around him, he again demanded of the artist who he was, and by what accident he came to know and address him by his name.

"Your worship cannot but remember," said the smith, "that about three years since, upon St. Lucy's Eve, there came a traveling juggler to a certain hall in Devonshire, and exhibited his skill before a worshipful knight and a fair company. I see from your worship's countenance, dark as this place is, that my memory has not done me wrong."

"Thou hast said enough," said Tressilian, turning away, as wishing to hide from the speaker the painful train of recollections which his discourse had unconsciously awakened.

"The juggler," said the smith, "played his part so bravely that the clowns and clown-like squires in the company held his art to be little less than magical; but there was one maiden of fifteen or thereby, with the fairest face I ever looked upon, whose rosy cheek grew pale, and her bright eyes dim, at the sight of the wonders exhibited."

"Peace, I command thee — peace!" said Tressilian.

"I mean your worship no offence," said the fellow; "but I have cause to remember how, to relieve the young maiden's fears, you condescended to point out the mode in which these deceptions were practiced, and to baffle the poor juggler by laying bare the mysteries of his art, as ably as if you had been a brother of his order. She was indeed so fair a maiden that, to win a smile of her, a man might well —"

"Not a word more of her, I charge thee!" said Tressilian. "I do well remember the night you speak of — one of the few happy evenings my life has known."

"She is gone, then," said the smith, interpreting after his own fashion the sigh with which Tressilian uttered these words — "she is gone, young, beautiful, and beloved as she was! I crave your worship's pardon, I should have hammered on another theme — I see I have unwarily driven the nail to the quick."

This speech was made with a mixture of rude feeling which inclined Tressilian favorably to the poor artisan, of whom before he was inclined to judge very harshly.

"I think," proceeded Tressilian, after a minute's silence, "thou wert in those days a jovial fellow, who could keep a company merry by song, and tale, and rebeck, as well as by thy juggling tricks; why do I find thee a laborious handicraftsman, plying thy trade in so melancholy a dwelling, and under such extraordinary circumstances?"

"My story is not long," said the artist; "but your honor had better sit while you listen to it." So saying, he approached to the fire a three-footed stool, and took another himself, while Dickie Sludge, or Flibbertigibbet, as he called the boy, drew a cricket to the smith's feet, and looked up in his face with features which, as illuminated by the glow of the forge, seemed convulsed with intense curiosity. "Thou too," said the smith to him, "shalt learn, as thou well deservest at my hand, the brief history of my life, and, in troth, it were as well to tell it thee as leave thee to ferret it out, since nature never packed a shrewder wit

into a more ungainly casket. Well, sir, if my poor story may pleasure you, it is at your command."

"Go on with thy story," said Tressilian.

"I was bred a blacksmith," said the artist, "and knew my art as well as e'er a black-thumb'd, leathern-apron'd, swart-faced knave of that noble mystery. But I tired of ringing hammer tunes on iron stithies, and went out into the world, where I became acquainted with a celebrated juggler, who wished to have the aid of an apprentice in his noble mystery. I served him for six years, until I was master of my trade. It was not long after I had performed at Sir Hugh Robsart's, in your worship's presence," said the artist, "that I took myself to the stage, and have swaggered with the bravest of them all, both at the Black Bull, the Globe, the Fortune, and elsewhere. But I tired of it, renounced my half-share in the company, gave my foil to my comrade, my buskins to the wardrobe, and showed the theater a clean pair of heels."

"Well, friend, and what," said Tressilian, "was your next shift?"

"I became," said the smith, "half-partner, half-domestic, to a man of much skill and little substance, who practised the trade of a physicianer.

"He was not only a bold, adventurous practitioner in physic, but also, an adept, who read the stars, and expounded the fortunes of mankind. He was a learned distiller of simples, and a profound chemist. Being besotted with his own imaginations, and conceited of his high chemical skill, he began to spend, in cheating himself, the money which he had acquired in cheating others, and either discovered or built for himself, this secret laboratory, in which he used to seclude himself both from patients and disciples, who doubtless thought his long and mysterious absences were occasioned by his progress in the mystic sciences, and his intercourse with the invisible world. Me also he tried to deceive; but, though I contradicted him not, he saw that I knew too

much of his secrets to be any longer a safe companion. Meanwhile, his name waxed famous, or rather infamous. Men cursed and threatened him, and bestowed on me the nickname of the devil's foot post. At length my master suddenly disappeared, pretending to me that he was about to visit this place, and forbidding me to disturb him till two days were past. When this period had elapsed, I resorted to this vault, where I found the fires extinguished and the utensils in confusion, with a note from the learned Doboobius, as he was wont to style himself, acquainting me that we should never meet again, and bequeathing me his chemical apparatus.

"Being by nature cautious, and suspicious from knowing with whom I had to do, I made so many perquisitions before I ventured even to light a fire, that I at length discovered a small barrel of gunpowder, carefully hid beneath the furnace, with the purpose, no doubt, that, as soon as I should commence the grand work of the transmutation of metals, the explosion should transmute the vault and all in it into a heap of ruins. This cured me of alchemy, and fain would I have returned to the honest hammer and anvil; but who would bring a horse to be shod by the devil's post? Meantime, I had won the regard of my honest Flibbertigibbet here, by teaching him a few secrets, such as please youth at his age; and after much counsel together, we agreed that, since I could get no practice in the ordinary way, I should try how I could work out business among these ignorant boors by practising upon their silly fears; and, thanks to Flibbertigibbet, who hath spread my renown, I have not wanted custom. But it is won at too great risk, and I fear I shall be at length taken up for a wizard; so that I seek but an opportunity to leave this vault when I can have the protection of some worshipful person."

"And art thou," said Tressilian, "perfectly acquainted with the roads in this country?"

"I could ride them every inch by midnight," answered Wayland Smith.

"Thou hast no horse to ride upon," said Tressilian.

"Pardon me," replied Wayland, "I have as good a tit as ever yeoman bestrode."

"Get thyself washed and shaved, then," said Tressilian; "reform thy dress as well as thou canst, and fling away these grotesque trappings; and, so thou wilt be secret and faithful, thou shalt follow me for a short time, till thy pranks here are forgotten."

Wayland Smith eagerly embraced the proposal, and protested his devotion to his new master. In a very few minutes he had made so great an alteration in his original appearance, that Tressilian could not help remarking, that he thought he would stand in little need of a protector, since none of his old acquaintances were likely to recognize him.

"My debtors would not pay me money," said Wayland, shaking his head; "but my creditors of every kind would be less easily blinded."

So saying, he led the way out of the cavern. He then called loudly for Hobgoblin, who, after lingering for an instant, appeared with the horse furniture, when Wayland closed, and sedulously covered up, the trapdoor, observing, it might again serve him at his need, besides that the tools were worth somewhat. A whistle from the owner brought to his side a nag that fed quietly on the common. While he accoutred him for the journey, Tressilian drew his own girths tighter, and in a few minutes both were ready to mount.

At this moment Sludge approached to bid them farewell.

"You are going to leave me, then, my old playfellow," said the boy; "and there is an end of all our game at bo-peep with the cowardly lubbards whom I brought hither to have their broad-footed nags shod by the devil and his imps?"

"It is even so," said Wayland Smith; "the best friends must part, Flibbertigibbet; but thou, my boy, art the only thing in the Vale of Whitehorse which I shall regret to leave behind me."

"Well, I bid thee not farewell," said Dickie Sludge, "for you will be at these revels, I judge, and so shall I."

"In good time," said Wayland; "but I pray you to do nought rashly."

"Nay, now you would make a child — a common child of me. But before you are a mile from these stones you shall know by a sure token that I have more of the hobgoblin about me than you credit."

"What dost thou mean, boy?" said Tressilian; but Flibbertigibbet only answered with a grin and a caper, and bidding both of them farewell, and at the same time exhorting them to make the best of their way from the place, he set them the example by running homeward with uncommon velocity.

"It is in vain to chase him," said Wayland Smith; "and, besides, what would it avail? Better make the best of our way hence, as he advises."

They mounted their horses accordingly, and began to proceed at a round pace, as soon as Tressilian had explained to his guide the direction in which he desired to travel.

After they had trotted nearly a mile, Tressilian observed that his horse felt more lively under him than even when he mounted in the morning.

"Are you advised of that?" said Wayland Smith, smiling. "That is owing to a little secret of mine. I mixed that with an handful of oats which shall save your worship's heels the trouble of spurring these six hours at least."

"I trust," said Tressilian, "your drugs will do my horse no harm?"

"No more than the mare's milk which foaled him," answered the artist; and was proceeding to dilate on the excellence of his recipe, when he was interrupted by an explosion as loud and tremendous as the mine which blows up the rampart of a beleaguered city. The horses started, and the riders were equally

surprised. They turned to gaze in the direction from which the thunder-clap was heard, and beheld, just over the spot they had left so recently, a huge pillar of dark smoke rising high into the clear blue atmosphere. "My habitation is gone to wreck," said Wayland, immediately conjecturing the cause of the explosion. "I was a fool to mention the doctor's kind intentions toward my mansion before that limb of mischief Flibbertigibbet. But let us hasten on, for the sound will collect the country to the spot."

So saying, he spurred his horse, and Tressilian also quickening his speed, they rode briskly forward.

"This, then, was the meaning of the little imp's token which he promised us?" said Tressilian; "had we lingered near the spot, we had found it a love-token with a vengeance."

"He would have given us warning," said the smith; "I saw him look back more than once to see if we were off — 'tis a very devil for mischief, yet not an ill-natured devil either."

Tressilian pursued the conversation no farther; and they continued their journey towards Devonshire without farther adventure, until they alighted at an inn in Bradford, where they reposed themselves for the night.

The next morning found them early travelers. And, not to fatigue the reader with unnecessary particulars, they traversed without adventure the counties of Wiltshire and Somerset, and, about noon of the third day after Tressilian's leaving Cumnor, arrived at Sir Hugh Robsart's seat, called Lidcote Hall, on the frontiers of Devonshire.

CHAPTER X.

THE ancient seat of Lidcote Hall was situated near the village of the same name, and adjoined the wild and extensive forest of Exmoor, in which some ancient rights belonging to the Robsart family entitled Sir Hugh to pursue his favorite amusement of the

chase. The old mansion was a low, venerable building, occupying a considerable space of ground, which was surrounded by a deep moat. The approach and drawbridge were defended by an octagonal tower, of ancient brickwork, but so clothed with ivy and other creepers that it was difficult to discover of what materials it was constructed.

The entrance to the courtyard of the old mansion lay through an archway, surmounted by the foresaid tower, but the drawbridge was down, and one leaf of the iron-studded folding-doors stood carelessly open. Tressilian hastily rode over the drawbridge, entered the court, and began to call loudly on the domestics by their names. For some time he was only answered by the echoes and the howling of the hounds, whose kennel lay at no great distance from the mansion. At length Will Badger, the old and favorite attendant of the knight, who acted alike as squire of his body and superintendent of his sports, made his appearance. The stout, weather-beaten forester showed great signs of joy when he recognized Tressilian.

"Lord love you," he said, "Master Edmund, be it thou in flesh and fell? Then thou mayst do some good on Sir Hugh."

"Is Sir Hugh then worse since I went away, Will?" demanded Tressilian.

"For worse in body — no, he is much better," replied the domestic; "but he is clean mazed as it were — eats and drinks as he was wont, but sleeps not, or rather wakes not, for he is ever in a sort of twilight, that is neither sleeping nor waking. Dame Swineford thought it was like the dead palsy. 'But no — no, dame,' said I, 'it is the heart — it is the heart.'"

"Can ye not stir his mind to any pastimes?" said Tressilian.

"He is clean and quite off his sports," said Will Badger; "hath neither touched backgammon or shovel-board, nor looked on the big book of harrowtry wi' Master Mumblazen."

"Thou shalt tell me the rest within doors, Will. Meanwhile,

let this person be ta'en to the buttery, and used with respect. He is a man of art."

As he spoke the door opened, and Master Mumblazen appeared — a withered, thin, elderly gentleman, with a cheek like a winter apple. Having welcomed Tressilian with a nod and a shake of the hand, he beckoned him to follow to Sir Hugh's great chamber, which the good knight usually inhabited. Will Badger followed, unasked, anxious to see whether his master would be relieved from his state of apathy by the arrival of Tressilian.

In a long, low parlor, amply furnished with implements of the chase, and with silvan trophies, by a massive stone chimney, over which hung a sword and suit of armor, sat Sir Hugh Robsart of Lidcote, a man of large size, which had been only kept within moderate compass by the constant use of violent exercise. It seemed to Tressilian that the lethargy under which his old friend appeared to labor had, even during his few weeks' absence, added bulk to his person. The curate, a gray-headed clergyman, sat with a book in his hand in another recess in the apartment. He signed a mournful greeting to Tressilian.

As Tressilian, his own eyes filling fast with tears, approached more and more nearly to the father of his betrothed bride, Sir Hugh's intelligence seemed to revive. He sighed heavily, as one who awakens from a state of stupor, a slight convulsion passed over his features, he opened his arms without speaking a word, and, as Tressilian threw himself into them, he folded him to his bosom.

"There is something left to live for yet," were the first words he uttered; and while he spoke, he gave vent to his feelings in a paroxysm of weeping, the tears chasing each other down his sunburnt cheeks and long white beard. "I will ask thee no questions, no questions — none, Edmund; thou hast not found her, or so found her that she were better lost."

Tressilian was unable to reply, otherwise than by putting his hands before his face.

"It is enough — it is enough. But do not thou weep for her, Edmund. I have cause to weep, for she was my daughter; thou hast cause to rejoice, that she did not become thy wife. Great God! Thou knowest best what is good for us. It was my nightly prayer that I should see Amy and Edmund wedded; had it been granted, it had now been gall added to bitterness. My brain has been at fault, Tressilian, almost ever since thou hast been away, and even yet it hunts counter."

"Your worship," said the good clergyman, "had better retire to your apartment, and try to sleep for a little space; the physician left a composing draught, and our Great Physician has commanded us to use earthly means, that we may be strengthened to sustain the trials He sends us."

"True — true, old friend," said Sir Hugh, "and we will bear our trials manfully. We have lost but a woman. See Tressilian" — he drew from his bosom a long ringlet of glossy hair — "see this lock! I tell thee, Edmund, the very night she disappeared, when she bid me good even, as she was wont, she hung about my neck and fondled me more than usual; and I, like an old fool, held her by this lock, until she took her scissors, severed it, and left it in my hand — as all I was ever to see more of her!"

Tressilian was unable to reply, well judging what a complication of feelings must have crossed the bosom of the unhappy fugitive at that cruel moment.

"Tressilian," continued the old knight, "thou art as welcome as if thou hadst brought better news. But we have spoken too long dry-lipped. Amy, fill a cup of wine to Edmund and another to me." Then instantly recollecting that he called upon her who could not hear, he shook his head, and said to the clergyman, "This grief is to my bewildered mind what the church of Lidcote is to our park; we may lose ourselves among the briars and thickets for a little space, but from the end of each avenue we see the old gray steeple and the grave of my forefathers. I would I were to travel that road to-morrow!"

Tressilian and the curate joined in urging the exhausted old man to lay himself to rest, and at length prevailed. Tressilian remained by his pillow till he saw that slumber at length sunk down on him, and then returned to consult with the curate what steps should be adopted in these unhappy circumstances.

They could not exclude from these deliberations Master Michael Mumbazen. He was an old bachelor of good family, but small fortune, and distantly related to the house of Robsart; in virtue of which connection, Lidcote Hall had been honored with his residence for the last twenty years. His company was agreeable to Sir Hugh, chiefly on account of his profound learning, which, though it only related to heraldry and genealogy, with such scraps of history as connected themselves with these subjects, was precisely of a kind to captivate the good old knight.

"We have had an unhappy time of it with the good knight, Master Edmund," said the curate. "In the name of Heaven, tell us, have you any news of that unhappy maiden? Have you not at least discovered her place of residence?"

"I have," replied Tressilian. "Know you Cumnor Place, near Oxford?"

"Surely," said the clergyman; "it was a house of removal for the monks of Abingdon."

"There," said Tressilian, "this unhappy maiden resides, in company with the villain Varney. But for a strange mishap, my sword had revenged all our injuries, as well as hers, on his worthless head."

"Thank God, that kept thine hand from blood-guiltiness, rash young man!" answered the curate. "'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, and I will repay it.' It were better study to free her from the villain's nets of infamy."

"It is in that I require your aid, my friends," said Tressilian; "I am resolved to accuse this villain, at the very foot of the throne. The Queen shall hear me, though the Earl of Leicester, the villain's patron, stood at her right hand."

"But wert thou not better apply to the Earl of Leicester, in the first place, for justice on his servant?" suggested the curate. "If he grants it, thou dost save the risk of making thyself a powerful adversary, which will certainly chance if, in the first instance, you accuse his master of the horse and prime favorite before the Queen."

"My mind revolts from your counsel," said Tressilian. "I cannot brook to plead my noble patron's cause — the unhappy Amy's cause — before any one save my lawful sovereign. Still, I will think on what thou hast said; but I must have your assistance to persuade the good Sir Hugh to make me his commissioner in this matter, for it is in his name I must speak, and not in my own."

"If it be your object, as I cannot question," said the clergyman, "to save, as much as is yet possible, the credit of this unhappy young woman, I repeat, you should apply, in the first instance, to the Earl of Leicester. He is as absolute in his household as the Queen in her kingdom."

"You are right — you are right," said Tressilian, eagerly, "and I thank you for pointing out what I overlooked in my haste. I little thought ever to have besought grace of Leicester; but I could kneel to the proud Dudley, doing so could remove one shade of shame from this unhappy ~~my~~ ^{my} ~~myself~~ ^{myself}."

"At first," said the clergyman, "she did not, as it seemed to me, much affect Varney's company, but latterly I saw them often together. I once came on them by chance, in the South wood in a spring evening; Varney was ruffled in a russet cloak, so that I saw not his face; they separated hastily, as they heard me rustle amongst the leaves, and I observed she turned her head and looked long after him."

"And on the day of her flight, and that was on St. Austin's Eve, I saw Varney's groom, attired in his liveries, hold his master's horse and Mistress Amy's palfrey, bridled and saddled *proper*, behind the wall of the churchyard," said Master Mumblazen.

"And now is she found mewed up in his secret place of retirement," said Tressilian. "But I must prepare for my journey. Do you, gentlemen, dispose my patron to grant me such powers as are needful to act in his name."

So saying, Tressilian left the room.

Sir Hugh's sleep was long and healthful; and the poor old knight awoke, humbled indeed in thought, and weak in frame, yet a much better judge of whatever was subjected to his intellect than he had been for some time past. He resisted for a while the proposal made by his friends that Tressilian should undertake a journey to court, to attempt the recovery of his daughter, and the redress of her wrongs, in so far as they might yet be repaired. "Let her go," he said; "she is but a hawk that goes down the wind; I would not bestow even a whistle to reclaim her." But though he for some time maintained this argument, he was at length convinced it was his duty to take the part to which natural affection inclined him, and consent that such efforts as could yet be made should be used by Tressilian in behalf of his daughter. He subscribed, therefore, a warrant of attorney, such as the curate's skill enabled him to draw up; for in those simple days the clergy were often the advisers of their flock in law as well as in gospel.

While Tressilian was making preparations for his departure early the ensuing morning, Wayland Smith desired to speak with him, expressing his wish to accompany him to court. This was indeed what Tressilian himself had several times thought of; for the shrewdness, alertness of understanding, and variety of resource which this fellow had exhibited during the time they had traveled together, had made him sensible that his assistance might be of importance. But then Wayland was in danger from the grasp of law; and Tressilian hesitated to accept his services. He knew not much of this strange fellow, and was doubtful how far he could repose in him the confidence necessary to render him an useful attendant upon the present emergency. Ere he

had come to a determination, the trampling of a horse was heard in the courtyard, and Master Mumblazen and Will Badger both entered hastily.

"Here is a serving-man on the bonniest gray tit I ever see'd in my life," said Will Badger, who got the start; — "having on his arm a silver cognizance, being a fire-drake holding in his mouth a brickbat, under a coronet of an earl's degree," said Master Mumblazen, "and bearing a letter sealed of the same."

Tressilian took the letter, which was addressed "To the worshipful Master Edmund Tressilian, our loving kinsman — These — ride, ride, ride — for thy life, for thy life, for thy life." He then opened it, and found the following contents: —

"MASTER TRESSILIAN, OUR GOOD FRIEND AND COUSIN —

"We are at present so ill at ease, and otherwise so unhappily circumstanced, that we are desirous to have around us those of our friends on whose loving-kindness we can most especially repose confidence; amongst whom we hold our good Master Tressilian one of the foremost and nearest, both in good will and good ability. We therefore pray you, with your most convenient speed, to repair to our poor lodging at Say's Court, near Deptford, where we will treat farther with you of matters which we deem it not fit to commit unto writing. And so we bid you heartily farewell, being your loving kinsman to command,

"RATCLIFFE, EARL OF SUSSEX."

"Send up the messenger instantly, Will Badger," said Tressilian; and as the man entered the room he exclaimed, "Ah, Stevens, is it you? how does my good lord?"

"Ill, Master Tressilian," was the messenger's reply.

"But what is my lord's malady?" said Tressilian, anxiously. "I heard nothing of his being ill."

"I know not, sir," replied the man; "he is very ill at ease. The leeches are at a stand, and many of his household suspect foul practice — witchcraft, or worse."

"What are the symptoms?" said Wayland Smith, stepping forward hastily.

"Anan?" said the messenger, not comprehending his meaning.

"What does he ail?" said Wayland; "where lies his disease?"

The man looked at Tressilian, as if to know whether he should answer these inquiries from a stranger, and receiving a sign in the affirmative, he hastily enumerated gradual loss of strength, nocturnal perspiration, and loss of appetite, faintness, etc.

"Joined," said Wayland, "to a gnawing pain in the stomach, and a low fever?"

"Even so," said the messenger, somewhat surprised.

"I know how the disease is caused," said the artist, "and I know the cause. Your master has eaten of the manna of St. Nicholas. I know the cure too: my master shall not say I studied in his laboratory for nothing."

"How mean you?" said Tressilian, frowning; "we speak of one of the first nobles of England. Bethink you, this is no subject for buffoonery."

"God forbid!" said Wayland Smith. "I say that I know his disease, and can cure him."

"We will set forth instantly," said Tressilian. "God calls us."

Accordingly, hastily mentioning this new motive for his instant departure, he took the kindest leave of Sir Hugh and the family at Lidcote Hall, who accompanied him with prayers and blessings, and, attended by Wayland and the Earl of Sussex's domestic, traveled with the utmost speed towards London.

CHAPTER XI.

SAY'S COURT, the habitation of Lord Sussex, was watched like a beleaguered fort; and so high rose the suspicions of the time, that Tressilian and his attendants were stopped and questioned repeatedly by sentinels, both on foot and horseback, as they approached the abode of the sick earl. In truth, the high rank which Sussex held in Queen Elizabeth's favor, and his known and avowed rivalry of the Earl of Leicester, caused the utmost importance to be attached to his welfare; for, at the period we treat of, all men doubted whether he or the Earl of Leicester might ultimately have the higher rank in her regard.

The two nobles who at present stood as rivals in her favor possessed very different pretensions to share it; yet it might be in general said that the Earl of Sussex had been most serviceable to the queen, while Leicester was most dear to the woman. The illness of Sussex therefore happened so opportunely for Leicester as to give rise to strange surmises among the public; while the followers of the one earl were filled with the deepest apprehensions, and those of the other with the highest hopes of its probable issue. Meanwhile, the retainers of each noble flocked around their patron, appeared well armed in the vicinity of the court itself, and disturbed the ear of the sovereign by their frequent and alarming debates, held even within the precincts of her palace.

On Tressilian's arrival at Say's Court, he found the place filled with the retainers of the Earl of Sussex, and of the gentlemen who came to attend their patron in his illness. Arms were in every hand, and a deep gloom on every countenance, as if they had apprehended an immediate and violent assault from the opposite faction. In the hall, however, to which Tressilian was ushered by one of the earl's attendants, while another went to inform Sussex of his arrival, he found only two gentlemen in

waiting The attire of the elder gentleman, a person, as it seemed, of quality, and in the prime of life, was very plain and soldierlike, his stature low, his limbs stout, his bearing ungraceful, and his features of that kind which express sound common sense, without a grain of vivacity or imagination. The younger, who seemed about twenty or upwards, was clad in the gayest habit used by persons of quality at the period, wearing a crimson velvet cloak richly ornamented with lace and embroidery, with a bonnet of the same, encircled with a gold chain turned three times round it and secured by a medal. His hair was combed upwards, and made to stand as it were on end; and in his ears he wore a pair of silver earrings, having each a pearl of considerable size. The countenance of this youth, besides being regularly handsome and accompanied by a fine person, was animated and striking. Both these gentlemen reclined nearly in the same posture on benches near each other; but each seeming engaged in his own meditations, looked straight upon the wall which was opposite to them, without speaking to his companion.

At the entrance of Tressilian they started from their musing and bade him welcome; the younger, in particular, with great appearance of animation and cordiality.

"Thou art welcome, Tressilian," said the youth; "thy philosophy stole thee from us when this household had objects of ambition to offer; it is an honest philosophy, since it returns thee to us when there are only dangers to be shared."

"Is my lord, then, so greatly indisposed?" said Tressilian.

"We fear the very worst," answered the elder gentleman, "and by the worst practice."

"Fy," replied Tressilian, "my Lord of Leicester is honorable."

"What doth he with such attendants, then, as he hath about him?" said the younger gallant.

"And is this all of you, my mates," inquired Tressilian, "that are about my lord in his utmost straits?"

"No — no," replied the elder gentleman, "there are Tracy,

Markham, and several more; but we keep watch here by twos at once, and some are weary and are sleeping in the gallery above."

At this moment the earl's chamberlain entered, and informed Tressilian that his lord required to speak with him.

He found Lord Sussex dressed, but unbraced and lying on his couch, and was shocked at the alteration disease had made in his person. The earl received him with the most friendly cordiality, and inquired into the state of his courtship. Tressilian evaded his inquiries for a moment, and turning his discourse on the earl's own health, he discovered, to his surprise, that the symptoms of his disorder corresponded minutely with those which Wayland had predicated concerning it. He hesitated not, therefore, to communicate to Sussex the whole history of his attendant, and the pretensions he set up to cure the disorder under which he labored. The earl listened with incredulous attention until the name of Demetrius was mentioned, and then suddenly called to his secretary to bring him a certain casket which contained papers of importance. "Take out from thence," he said, "the declaration of the rascal cook whom we had under examination, and see whether he had not been supplied with his materials by a herbalist called Demetrius."

The secretary turned to the passage at once. "It is even so," said he. "And he adds, he has not since seen the said Demetrius."

"This accords with thy fellow's story, Tressilian," said the earl; "call him hither."

On being summoned to the earl's presence, Wayland Smith told his former tale with firmness and consistency.

"It may be," said the earl, "thou art sent by those who have begun this work, to end it for them; but bethink, if I miscarry under thy medicine, it may go hard with thee."

"That were severe measure," said Wayland, "since the issue of medicine, and the end of life, are in God's disposal. But I will stand the risk."

"Nay, if thou be'st so confident," said the Earl of Sussex, "I will take the risk, too, for the learned can do nothing for me. Tell me how this medicine is to be taken."

"That will I do presently," said Wayland; "but allow me to condition that, since I incur all the risk of this treatment, no other physician shall be permitted to interfere with it."

"That is but fair," replied the earl; "and now prepare your drug."

While Wayland obeyed the earl's commands, his servants, by the artist's direction, undressed their master and placed him in bed.

"I warn you," he said, "that the first operation of this medicine will be to produce a heavy sleep, during which time the chamber must be kept undisturbed, as the consequences may otherwise be fatal. I myself will watch by the earl, with any of the gentlemen of his chamber."

"Let all leave the room save Stanley and this good fellow," said the earl.

"And saving me also," said Tressilian. "I too am deeply interested in the effects of this potion."

"Be it so, good friend," said the earl; "and now for our experiment; but first call my secretary and chamberlain."

"Bear witness," he continued, when these officers arrived — "bear witness for me, gentlemen, that our honorable friend Tressilian is in no way responsible for the effects which this medicine may produce upon me, the taking it being my own free action and choice. Commend me to my noble and princely mistress; and say that I live and die her true servant, and wish to all about her throne the same singleness of heart and will to serve her, with more ability to do so than hath been assigned to poor Thomas Ratcliffe."

He then folded his hands, and seemed for a second or two absorbed in mental devotion, then took the potion in his hand, and, pausing, regarded Wayland with a look that seemed designed

to penetrate his very soul, but which caused no anxiety or hesitation in the countenance or manner of the artist.

"Here is nothing to be feared," said Sussex to Tressilian, and swallowed the medicine without farther hesitation.

"I am now to pray your lordship," said Wayland, "to dispose yourself to rest as commodiously as you can; and of you, gentlemen, to remain as still and mute as if you waited at your mother's deathbed."

The chamberlain and secretary then withdrew, giving orders that all doors should be bolted, and all noise in the house strictly prohibited. Wayland Smith's predictions were speedily accomplished, and a sleep fell upon the earl so deep and sound that they who watched his bedside began to fear that, in his weakened state, he might pass away without awakening from his lethargy. Wayland Smith himself appeared anxious, and felt the temples of the earl slightly from time to time, attending particularly to the state of his respiration, which was full and deep, but at the same time easy and uninterrupted.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE is no period at which men look worse in the eyes of each other, or feel more uncomfortable, than when the first dawn of daylight finds them watchers. Such was the pale, inauspicious, and ungrateful light which began to beam upon those who kept watch all night in the hall at Say's Court, and which mingled its cold, pale, blue diffusion with the red, yellow, and smoky beams of expiring lamps and torches. The young gallant whom we noticed in our last chapter had left the room for a few minutes, to learn the cause of a knocking at the outward gate, and on his return was so struck with the forlorn and ghastly aspects of his companions of the watch, that he exclaimed, "Pity of my heart, my masters, how like owls you look!"

"Hold thy peace, thou gibing fool," said Blount — "hold thy peace. Is this a time for jeering, when the manhood of England is perchance dying within a wall's breadth of thee?"

"I pray thee, Walter," said another of the company, "tell us who was at the gate just now."

"Doctor Masters, physician to her Grace in ordinary, sent by her especial orders to inquire after the earl's health," answered Walter.

"Ha! what!" exclaimed Tracy, "that was no slight mark of favor; if the earl can but come through, he will match with Leicester yet. Is Masters with my lord at present?"

"Nay," replied Walter, "he is half-way back to Greenwich by this time, and in high dudgeon."

"Thou didst not refuse him admittance?" exclaimed Tracy.

"Thou wert not, surely, so mad?" ejaculated Blount.

"I refused him admittance as flatly, Blount, as you would refuse a penny to a blind beggar; as obstinately, Tracy, as thou didst ever deny access to a dun."

"Why, in the fiend's name, didst thou trust him to go to the gate?" said Blount to Tracy.

"It suited his years better than mine," answered Tracy; "but he has undone us all now thoroughly. My lord may live or die, he will never have a look of favor from her Majesty again."

"Nor the means of making fortunes for his followers," said the young gallant, smiling contemptuously; "there lies the sore point that will brook no handling. My good sirs, I sounded my lamentations over my lord somewhat less loudly than some of you; but when the point comes of doing him service, I will yield to none of you. Had this learned leech entered, thinkest thou not there had been such a coil betwixt him and Tressilian's mediciner that not the sleeper only, but the very dead, might have awakened?"

"And who is to take the blame of opposing the Queen's orders?" said Tracy.

"I, who have done the wrong, will bear the blame," said Walter. "Adieu for a space, my masters. I go to walk in the court and look to the sentinels."

"The lad hath quicksilver in his veins, that is certain," said Blount, looking at Markham.

"He hath that both in brain and blood," said Markham, "which may either make or mar him. But, in closing the door against Masters, he hath done a daring and loving piece of service."

Morning was well advanced, when Tressilian, fatigued and over-watched, came down to the hall with the joyful intelligence that the earl had awakened of himself, that he found his internal complaints much mitigated, and spoke with a cheerfulness, and looked round with a vivacity, which of themselves showed a material and favorable change had taken place.

When the message of the Queen was communicated to the Earl of Sussex, he at first smiled at the repulse which the physician had received from his zealous young follower, but instantly recollecting himself, he commanded Blount, his master of the horse, instantly to take boat and go down the river to the Palace of Greenwich, taking young Walter and Tracy with him, and make a suitable compliment, expressing his grateful thanks to his sovereign, and mentioning the cause why he had not been enabled to profit by the assistance of the wise and learned Doctor Masters.

"A plague on it," said Blount, as he descended the stairs, "had he sent me with a cartel¹ to Leicester, I think I should have done his errand indifferently well. But to go to our gracious sovereign, before whom all words must be lackered over either with gilding or with sugar, is such a confectionary matter as clean baffles my poor old English brain. Come with me,

¹ A challenge.

Tracy; and come you too, Master Walter Wittypate, that art the cause of our having all this ado. Let us see if thy neat brain, that frames so many flashy fireworks, can help out a plain fellow at need with some of thy shrewd devices."

"Never fear — never fear," exclaimed the youth, "it is I will help you through; let me but fetch my cloak."

"Why, thou hast it on thy shoulders," said Blount: "the lad is mazed."

"No, no, this is Tracy's old mantle," answered Walter; "I go not with thee to court unless as a gentleman should."

"Well — well," said Blount, "get thyself ready, a' God's name!"

They were soon launched on the princely bosom of the broad Thames, upon which the sun now shone forth in all its splendor.

"There are two things scarce matched in the universe," said Walter to Blount — "the sun in heaven, and the Thames on the earth."

"The one will light us to Greenwich well enough," said Blount, "and the other would take us there a little faster if it were ebb tide; and by my honor," he added, looking out from the head of the boat, "it seems to me as if our message were a sort of labor in vain; for see, the Queen's barge lies at the stairs, as if her Majesty were about to take water."

It was even so. The royal barge, manned with the Queen's watermen, richly attired in the regal liveries, and having the banner of England displayed, did indeed lie at the great stairs which ascended from the river, and along with it two or three other boats for transporting such part of her retinue as were not in immediate attendance on the royal person. The yeomen of the guard, the tallest and most handsome men whom England could produce, guarded with their halberds the passage from the palace gate to the river side, and all seemed in readiness for the Queen's coming forth, although the day was yet so early.

"By my faith, this bodes us no good," said Blount: "it must

be some perilous cause puts her Grace in motion thus untimely. By my counsel, we were best put back again, and tell the earl what we have seen."

"Tell the earl what we have seen!" said Walter; "why, what have we seen but a boat, and men with scarlet jerkins, and halberds in their hands? Let us do his errand, and tell him what the Queen says in reply."

So saying, he caused the boat to be pulled towards a landing-place at some distance from the principal one, which it would not, at that moment, have been thought respectful to approach, and jumped on shore, followed, though with reluctance, by his cautious and timid companions. As they approached the gate of the palace, one of the sergeant porters told them they could not at present enter, as her Majesty was in the act of coming forth.

At this moment the gates opened, and ushers began to issue forth in array, preceded and flanked by the band of gentlemen pensioners. After this, amid a crowd of lords and ladies, yet so disposed around her that she could see and be seen on all sides, came Elizabeth herself, then in the prime of womanhood, and in the full glow of what in a sovereign was called beauty. She leant on the arm of Lord Hunsdon, whose relation to her by her mother's side often procured him such distinguished marks of Elizabeth's intimacy.

The young cavalier we have so often mentioned had probably never yet approached so near the person of his sovereign, and he pressed forward as far as the line of warders permitted, in order to avail himself of the present opportunity. His companion, on the contrary, kept pulling him backwards, till Walter shook him off impatiently, and letting his rich cloak drop carelessly from one shoulder — a natural action, which served, however, to display to the best advantage his well-proportioned person — unbonneting at the same time, he fixed his eager gaze on the Queen's approach, with a mixture of respectful curiosity

and modest yet ardent admiration, which suited so well with his fine features, that the warders, struck with his rich attire and noble countenance, suffered him to approach the ground over which the Queen was to pass somewhat closer than was permitted to ordinary spectators. Thus the adventurous youth stood full in Elizabeth's eye — an eye never indifferent to the admiration which she deservedly excited among her subjects, or to the fair proportions of external form which chanced to distinguish any of her courtiers. Accordingly, she fixed her keen glance on the youth, as she approached the place where he stood, with a look in which surprise at his boldness seemed to be unmingled with resentment, while a trifling accident happened which attracted her attention towards him yet more strongly. The night had been rainy, and, just where the young gentleman stood, a small quantity of mud interrupted the Queen's passage. As she hesitated to pass on, the gallant, throwing his cloak from his shoulders, laid it on the miry spot, so as to insure her stepping over it dryshod. Elizabeth looked at the young man, who accompanied this act of devoted courtesy with a profound reverence, and a blush that overspread his whole countenance. The Queen was confused, and blushed in her turn, nodded her head, hastily passed on, and embarked in her barge without saying a word.

"Come along, sir coxcomb," said Blount; "your gay cloak will need the brush to-day, I wot."

"This cloak," said the youth, taking it up and folding it, "shall never be brushed while in my possession."

Their discourse was here interrupted by one of the band of pensioners.

"I was sent," said he, after looking at them attentively, "to a gentleman who hath no cloak, or a muddy one. You, sir, I think," addressing the younger cavalier, "are the man; you will please to follow me."

"He is in attendance on me," said Blount — "on me, the noble Earl of Sussex's master of horse."

"I have nothing to say to that," answered the messenger; "my orders are directly from her Majesty, and concern this gentleman only."

So saying, he walked away, followed by Walter, leaving the others behind, Blount's eyes almost starting from his head with the excess of his astonishment.

The young cavalier was, in the meanwhile, guided to the water-side by the pensioner, who showed him considerable respect. He ushered him into one of the wherries which lay ready to attend the Queen's barge, which was already proceeding up the river.

The two rowers used their oars with such expedition, at the signal of the gentleman pensioner, that they very soon brought their little skiff under the stern of the Queen's boat, where she sate beneath an awning, attended by two or three ladies and the nobles of her household. She looked more than once at the wherry in which the young adventurer was seated, spoke to those around her, and seemed to laugh. At length one of the attendants, by the Queen's order apparently, made a sign for the wherry to come alongside, and the young man was desired to step from his own skiff into the Queen's barge, which he performed with graceful agility at the fore part of the boat, and was brought aft to the Queen's presence, the wherry at the same time dropping into the rear. The youth underwent the gaze of majesty not the less gracefully that his self-possession was mingled with embarrassment. The muddled cloak still hung upon his arm, and formed the natural topic with which the Queen introduced the conversation.

"You have this day spoiled a gay mantle in our behalf, young man. We thank you for your service, though the manner of offering it was unusual, and something bold."

"In a sovereign's need," answered the youth, "it is each liege-man's duty to be bold."

"That was well said, my lord," said the Queen, turning to a

grave person who sate by her. "Well, young man, your gallantry shall not go unrewarded. Go to the wardrobe-keeper, and he shall have orders to supply the suit which you have cast away in our service. Thou shalt have a suit, and that of the newest cut, I promise thee, on the word of a princess."

"May it please your Grace," said Walter, hesitating, "it is not for so humble a servant of your Majesty to measure out your bounties; but if it became me to choose ——"

"Thou wouldst have gold, I warrant me?" said the Queen, interrupting him. "Fy, young man! I take shame to say that, in our capital, such and so various are the means of thriftless folly, that to give gold to youth is giving fuel to fire, and furnishing them with the means of self-destruction. Yet thou mayst be poor," she added, "or thy parents may be. It shall be gold, if thou wilt, but thou shalt answer to me for the use on't."

Walter waited patiently until the Queen had done, and then modestly assured her that gold was still less in his wish than the raiment her Majesty had before offered.

"How, boy!" said the Queen, "neither gold nor garment! What is it thou wouldst have of me, then?"

"Only permission, madam — if it is not asking too high an honor — permission to wear the cloak which did you this trifling service."

"Permission to wear thine own cloak, thou silly boy!" said the Queen.

"It is no longer mine," said Walter; "when your Majesty's foot touched it, it became a fit mantle for a prince, but far too rich a one for its former owner."

The Queen again blushed; and endeavored to cover, by laughing, a slight degree of not unpleasing surprise and confusion.

"Heard you ever the like, my lords? The youth's head is turned with reading romances. I must know something of him, that I may send him safe to his friends. What art thou?"

"A gentleman of the household of the Earl of Sussex, so

please your Grace, sent hither with his master of horse, upon a message to your Majesty."

In a moment the gracious expression which Elizabeth's face had hitherto maintained gave way to an expression of haughtiness and severity.

"My Lord of Sussex," she said, "has taught us how to regard his messages, by the value he places upon ours. We sent but this morning the physician in ordinary of our chamber, and that at no usual time, understanding his lordship's illness to be more dangerous than we had before apprehended. There is at no court in Europe a man more skilled in this holy and most useful science than Doctor Masters, and he came from us to our subject. Nevertheless, he found the gate of Say's Court defended by men with culverins, as if it had been on the Borders of Scotland, not in the vicinity of our court; and when he demanded admittance in our name, it was stubbornly refused. For this slight of a kindness, which had but too much of condescension in it, we will receive, at present at least, no excuse; and some such we suppose to have been the purport of my Lord of Sussex's message."

This was uttered in a tone, and with a gesture, which made Lord Sussex's friends who were within hearing tremble. He to whom the speech was addressed, however, trembled not; but with great deference and humility, as soon as the Queen's passion gave him an opportunity, he replied — "So please your most gracious Majesty, I was charged with no apology from the Earl of Sussex."

"With what were you then charged, sir?" said the Queen; "was it with a justification? or with a defiance?"

"Madam," said the young man, "my Lord of Sussex knew the offense approached towards treason, and could think of nothing save of securing the offender, and placing him in your Majesty's hands, and at your mercy. The noble earl was fast asleep when your most gracious message reached him, a potion

having been administered to that purpose by his physician; and his lordship knew not of the ungracious repulse your Majesty's royal and most comfortable message had received until after he awoke this morning."

"And which of his domestics, then, presumed to reject my message, without even admitting my own physician to the presence of him whom I sent him to attend?" said the Queen, much surprised.

"The offender, madam, is before you," replied Walter, bowing very low; "the full and sole blame is mine; and my lord has most justly sent me to abye the consequences of a fault of which he is as innocent as a sleeping man's dreams can be of a waking man's actions."

"What! was it thou? — thou thyself, that repelled my messenger and my physician from Say's Court?" said the Queen. "What could occasion such boldness?"

"Madam," said the youth, who, notwithstanding an assumed appearance of severity, thought that he saw something in the Queen's face that resembled not implacability, "we say in our country that the physician is for the time the liege sovereign of his patient. Now, my noble master was then under dominion of a leech, by whose advice he hath greatly profited, who had issued his commands that his patient should not that night be disturbed on the very peril of his life."

"Thy master hath trusted some false varlet of an empiric," said the Queen.

"I know not, madam, but by the fact that he is now, this very morning, awakened much refreshed and strengthened, from the only sleep he hath had for many hours."

The Queen answered hastily, and without affecting to disguise her satisfaction, "By my word, I am glad he is better. But thou wert over bold to deny the access of my Doctor Masters. Know'st thou not the Holy Writ saith, 'In the multitude of counsel there is safety?'"

"Ay, madam," said Walter, "but I have heard learned men say that the safety spoken of is for the physicians, not for the patient."

"By my faith, child, thou hast pushed me home," said the Queen, laughing; "for my Hebrew learning does not come quite at a call. But for thee, young man, what is thy name and birth?"

"Raleigh is my name, most gracious Queen — the youngest son of a large but honorable family of Devonshire."

"Raleigh!" said Elizabeth, after a moment's recollection; "have we not heard of your service in Ireland?"

"I have been so fortunate as to do some service there, madam," replied Raleigh; "scarce, however, of consequence sufficient to reach your Grace's ears."

"They hear farther than you think of," said the Queen, graciously, "and have heard of a youth who defended a ford in Shannon against a whole band of wild Irish rebels, until the stream ran purple with their blood and his own."

"Some blood I may have lost," said the youth, looking down, "but it was where my best is due, and that is in your Majesty's service."

The Queen paused, and then said hastily, "You are very young to have fought so well and to speak so well. But you must not escape your penance for turning back Masters. So hark ye, Master Raleigh, see thou fail not to wear thy muddy cloak, in token of penitence, till our pleasure be farther known. And here," she added, giving him a jewel of gold in the form of a chessman, "I give thee this to wear at the collar."

Raleigh, to whom nature had taught intuitively, as it were, those courtly arts which many scarce acquire from long experience, knelt, and, as he took from her hand the jewel, kissed the fingers which gave it. He knew, perhaps, better than almost any of the courtiers who surrounded her, how to mingle the devotion claimed by the Queen with the gallantry due to her per-

sonal beauty; and in this, his first attempt to unite them, he succeeded so well as at once to gratify Elizabeth's personal vanity and her love of power.

"My lords and ladies," said the Queen, looking around to the retinue by whom she was attended, "methinks, since we are upon the river, it were well to renounce our present purpose of going to the city, and surprise this poor Earl of Sussex with a visit."

It may be readily supposed that none to whom this speech was addressed ventured to oppose its purport. The barge had, therefore, orders to deposit its royal freight at Deptford, at the nearest and most convenient point of communication with Say's Court, in order that the Queen might satisfy her royal and maternal solicitude by making personal inquiries after the health of the Earl of Sussex.

The royal barge soon stopped at Deptford, and, amid the loud shouts of the populace, which her presence never failed to excite, the Queen, with a canopy borne over her head, walked, accompanied by her retinue, towards Say's Court. Sussex, who was in the act of advising with Tressilian how he should make up the supposed breach in the Queen's favor, was infinitely surprised at learning her immediate approach — not that the Queen's custom of visiting her more distinguished nobility, whether in health or sickness, could be unknown to him; but the suddenness of the communication left no time for those preparations with which he well knew Elizabeth loved to be greeted, and the rudeness and confusion of his military household, much increased by his late illness, rendered him altogether unprepared for her reception.

Cursing internally the chance which thus brought her gracious visitation on him unaware, he hastened down with Tressilian, to whose eventful and interesting story he had just given an attentive ear.

"My worthy friend," he said, "such support as I can give your accusation of Varney, you have a right to expect, alike from

justice and gratitude. Chance will presently show whether I can do aught with our sovereign, or whether, in very deed, my meddling in your affair may not rather prejudice than serve you."

Thus spoke Sussex, while hastily casting around him a loose robe of sables, and adjusting his person in the best manner he could to meet the eye of his sovereign. But no hurried attention bestowed on his apparel could remove the ghastly effects of long illness on a countenance which nature had marked with features rather strong than pleasing. Besides, he was low of stature, and though broad-shouldered, athletic, and fit for martial achievements, his presence in a peaceful hall was not such as ladies love to look upon.

The earl's utmost despatch only enabled him to meet the Queen as she entered the great hall, and he at once perceived there was a cloud on her brow. Her jealous eye had noticed the martial array of armed gentlemen and retainers with which the mansion-house was filled, and her first words expressed her disapprobation — "Is this a royal garrison, my Lord of Sussex? Or have we by accident overshot Say's Court, and landed at our Tower of London?"

Lord Sussex hastened to offer some apology.

"It needs not," she said. "My lord, we intend speedily to take up a certain quarrel between your lordship and another great lord of our household, and at the same time to reprehend this uncivilized and dangerous practice of surrounding yourselves with armed, and even with ruffianly, followers, as if, in the neighborhood of our capital, nay, in the very verge of our royal residence, you were preparing to wage civil war with each other. We are glad to see you so well recovered, my lord, though without the assistance of the learned physician whom we sent to you. Urge no excuse; we know how that matter fell out, and we have corrected for it the wild slip, young Raleigh. By the way, my lord, we will speedily relieve your household of him, and take him into our own. Something there is about him which merits to be

better nurtured than he is like to be amongst your very military followers."

To this proposal Sussex, though scarce understanding how the Queen came to make it, could only bow and express his acquiescence. He then entreated her to remain till refreshment could be offered, but in this he could not prevail. And, after a few compliments of a much colder and more common-place character than might have been expected from a step so decidedly favorable as a personal visit, the Queen took her leave of Say's Court, having brought confusion thither along with her, and leaving doubt and apprehension behind.

CHAPTER XIII.

"I AM ordered to attend court to-morrow," said Leicester, speaking to Varney, "to meet, as they surmise, my Lord of Sussex. The Queen intends to take up matters betwixt us. This comes of her visit to Say's Court, of which you must needs speak so lightly."

"I maintain it was nothing," said Varney; "nay, I know from a sure intelligencer who was within ear-shot of much that was said, that Sussex has lost rather than gained by that visit. Let not your heart fail you, my lord, and all shall be well."

"My heart never failed me, sir," replied Leicester.

"No, my lord," said Varney; "but it has betrayed you right often. He that would climb a tree, my lord, must grasp by the branches, not by the blossom."

"Well — well — well!" said Leicester, impatiently, "I understand thy meaning. My heart shall neither fail me nor seduce me. Have my retinue in order; see that their array be so splendid as to put down not only the rude companions of Ratcliffe, but the retainers of every other nobleman and courtier.

Let them be well armed withal, but without any outward display of their weapons, wearing them as if more for fashion's sake than for use. Do thou thyself keep close to me; I may have business for you."

The preparations of Sussex and his party were not less anxious than those of Leicester.

"Thy supplication, impeaching Varney," said the earl to Tressilian, "is by this time in the Queen's hand. I have sent it through a sure channel. Methinks your suit should succeed, being, as it is, founded in justice and honor, and Elizabeth being the very muster of both. But, I wot not how, the gipsy (so Sussex was wont to call his rival, on account of his dark complexion) hath much to say with her in these holyday times of peace. Were war at the gates, I should be one of her whiteboys; but soldiers get out of fashion in peace time. Well, we must be gay. Blount, hast thou seen our household put into their new braveries?"

"My good lord," answered Blount, "Raleigh hath been here, and taken that charge upon him. Your train will glitter like a May morning."

"Give my brave kinsmen the strictest charges," said Sussex, "that they suffer no provocation short of actual violence to provoke them into quarrel; they have hot bloods, and I would not give Leicester the advantage over me by any imprudence of theirs."

The Earl of Sussex ran so hastily through these directions, that it was with difficulty Tressilian at length found opportunity to express his surprise, that he should have proceeded so far in the affair of Sir Hugh Robsart as to lay his petition at once before the Queen. "It was the opinion of the young lady's friends," he said, "that Leicester's sense of justice should be first appealed to, as the offense had been committed by his officer, and so he had expressly told to Sussex."

"This could have been done without applying to me," said

Sussex, somewhat haughtily. "I, at least, ought not to have been a counselor when the object was a humiliating reference to Leicester; and I am surprised that you, Tressilian, a man of honor, and my friend, would assume such a mean course. If you said so, I certainly understood you not in a matter which sounded so unlike yourself."

"My lord," said Tressilian, "the course I would prefer, for my own sake, is that you have adopted; but the friends of this most unhappy lady——"

"O, the friends—the friends," said Sussex, interrupting him; "they must let us manage this cause in the way which seems best. This is the time and the hour to accumulate every charge against Leicester and his household, and yours the Queen will hold a heavy one. But at all events she hath the complaint before her."

Tressilian could not help suspecting that, in his eagerness to strengthen himself against his rival, Sussex had purposely adopted the course most likely to throw odium on Leicester, without considering minutely whether it were the mode of proceeding most likely to be attended with success. But the step was irrevocable, and Sussex escaped from farther discussing it by dismissing his company.

While the rival statesmen were thus anxiously preparing for their approaching meeting in the Queen's presence, even Elizabeth herself was not without apprehension of what might chance from the collision of two such fiery spirits, each backed by a strong and numerous body of followers. The band of gentlemen pensioners were all under arms, and a reinforcement of the yeomen of the guard was brought down the Thames from London.

The eventful hour, thus anxiously prepared for on all sides, at length approached, and, each followed by his long and glittering train of friends and followers, the rival earls entered the palace yard of Greenwich at noon precisely.

As if by previous arrangement, or perhaps by intimation that

such was the Queen's pleasure, Sussex and his retinue came to the palace from Deptford by water, while Leicester arrived by land; and thus they entered the courtyard from opposite sides. This trifling circumstance gave Leicester a certain ascendancy in the opinion of the vulgar, the appearance of his cavalcade of mounted followers showing more numerous and more imposing than those of Sussex's party, who were necessarily upon foot. No show or sign of greeting passed between the earls, though each looked full at the other, both expecting, perhaps, an exchange of courtesies, which neither was willing to commence. Almost in the minute of their arrival the castle bell tolled, the gates of the palace were opened, and the earls entered, each numerously attended by such gentlemen of their train whose rank gave them that privilege. The yeomen and inferior attendants remained in the courtyard, where the opposite parties eyed each other with looks of eager hatred and scorn, as if waiting with impatience for some cause of tumult, or some apology for mutual aggression. But they were restrained by the strict commands of their leaders, and overawed, perhaps, by the presence of an armed guard of unusual strength.

In the meanwhile, the more distinguished persons of each train followed their patrons into the lofty halls and ante-chambers of the royal palace. The parties arranged themselves, as it were instinctively, on the different sides of the lofty apartments. The folding-doors at the upper end of the long gallery were immediately afterwards opened, and it was announced in a whisper that the Queen was in her presence-chamber, to which these gave access. Both earls moved slowly towards the entrance — Sussex followed by Tressilian, Blount, and Raleigh, and Leicester by Varney. The pride of Leicester was obliged to give way to court forms, and, with a grave and formal inclination of the head, he paused until his rival, a peer of older creation than his own, passed before him. Sussex returned the reverence with the same formal civility, and entered the presence-room. Tressilian

and Blount offered to follow him, but were not permitted, the Usher of the Black Rod alleging in excuse, that he had precise orders to look to all admissions that day. To Raleigh, who stood back on the repulse of his companions, he said, "You, sir, may enter," and he entered accordingly.

"Follow me close, Varney," said the Earl of Leicester, who had stood aloof for a moment to mark the reception of Sussex; and, advancing to the entrance, he was about to pass on, when Varney, who was close behind him, dressed out in the utmost bravery of the day, was stopped by the usher, as Tressilian and Blount had been before him. "How is this, Master Bowyer?" said the Earl of Leicester. "Know you who I am, and that this is my friend and follower?"

"Your lordship will pardon me," replied Bowyer, stoutly; "my orders are precise, and limit me to a strict discharge of my duty."

"Thou art a partial knave," said Leicester, the blood mounting to his face, "to do me this dishonor, when you but now admitted a follower of my Lord of Sussex."

"My lord," said Bowyer, "Master Raleigh is newly admitted a sworn servant of her Grace, and to him my orders did not apply."

"Thou art an ungrateful knave," said Leicester; "but he that hath done can undo; thou shalt not prank thee in thy authority long!"

This threat he uttered aloud, with less than his usual policy and discretion, and having done so, he entered the presence-chamber, and made his reverence to the Queen, who, attired with even more than her usual splendor, and surrounded by those nobles and statesmen whose courage and wisdom have rendered her reign immortal, stood ready to receive the homage of her subjects. She graciously returned the obeisance of the favorite earl, and looked alternately at him and at Sussex, as if about to speak, when Bowyer, a man whose spirit could not brook

the insult he had so openly received from Leicester, advanced with his black rod in his hand, and knelt down before her.

"Why, how now, Bowyer?" said Elizabeth, "thy courtesy seems strangely timed!"

"My liege sovereign," he said, while every courtier around trembled at his audacity, "I come but to ask whether, in the discharge of mine office, I am to obey your Highness's commands or those of the Earl of Leicester, who has publicly menaced me with his displeasure, and treated me with disparaging terms, because I denied entry to one of his followers, in obedience to your Grace's precise orders?"

The spirit of Henry VIII. was instantly aroused in the bosom of his daughter, and she turned on Leicester with a severity which appalled him, as well as all his followers.

"God's death! my lord," such was her emphatic phrase, "what means this? We have thought well of you, and brought you near to our person; but it was not that you might hide the sun from our other faithful subjects. Who gave you license to contradict our orders or control our officers? I will have in this court, ay, and in this realm, but one mistress, and no master. Look to it that Master Bowyer sustains no harm for his duty to me faithfully discharged; for, as I am Christian woman and crowned queen, I will hold you dearly answerable. Go, Bowyer, you have done the part of an honest man and a true subject. We will brook no mayor of the palace here."

Bowyer kissed the hand which she extended towards him, and withdrew to his post, astonished at the success of his own audacity. A smile of triumph pervaded the faction of Sussex; that of Leicester seemed proportionally dismayed, and the favorite himself, assuming an aspect of the deepest humility, did not even attempt a word in his own exculpation.

He acted wisely; for it was the policy of Elizabeth to humble, not to disgrace him. The dignity of the Queen was gratified,

and the woman began soon to feel for the mortification which she had imposed on her favorite. Her keen eye also observed the secret looks of congratulation exchanged amongst those who favored Sussex.

"What I say to my Lord of Leicester," she said, after a moment's pause, "I say also to you, my Lord of Sussex. You also must needs ruffle in the court of England, at the head of a faction of your own?"

"My followers, gracious princess," said Sussex, "have indeed ruffled in your cause in Ireland, in Scotland, and against yonder rebellious earls in the north. I am ignorant that——"

"Do you bandy looks and words with me, my lord?" said the Queen, interrupting him; "methinks you might learn of my Lord of Leicester the modesty to be silent, at least, under our censure. My Lord of Leicester, and you, my Lord of Sussex, I command you both to be friends with each other; or, by the crown I wear, you shall find an enemy who will be too strong for both of you!"

"Madam," said the Earl of Leicester, "you, who are yourself the fountain of honor, know best what is due to mine. I place it at your disposal, and only say, that the terms on which I have stood with my Lord of Sussex have not been of my seeking; nor had he cause to think me his enemy until he had done me gross wrong."

"For me, madam," said the Earl of Sussex, "I cannot appeal from your sovereign pleasure; but I were well content my Lord of Leicester should say in what I have, as he terms it, wronged him, since my tongue never spoke the word that I would not willingly justify either on foot or horseback."

"And for me," said Leicester, "always under my gracious sovereign's pleasure, my hand shall be as ready to make good my words as that of any man who ever wrote himself Ratcliffe."

"My lords," said the Queen, "these are no terms for this presence; and if you cannot keep your temper, we will find

means to keep both that and you close enough. Let me see you join hands, my lords, and forget your idle animosities."

The two rivals looked at each other with reluctant eyes, each unwilling to make the first advance to execute the Queen's will.

"Sussex," said Elizabeth, "I entreat — Leicester, I command you."

Yet, so were her words accented, that the entreaty sounded like command and the command like entreaty. They remained still and stubborn, until she raised her voice to a height which argued at once impatience and absolute command.

"Sir Henry Lee," she said to an officer in attendance, "have a guard in present readiness, and man a barge instantly. My Lords of Sussex and Leicester, I bid you once more to join hands — and he that refuses shall taste of our Tower fare ere he see our face again."

"The prison," said Leicester, "might be borne, but to lose your Grace's presence were to lose light and life at once. Here, Sussex, is my hand."

"And here," said Sussex, "is mine in truth and honesty; but ——"

"Nay, under favor, you shall add no more," said the Queen. "For, my lords, I tell you plainly, your follies and your brawls lead to strange disorders among your servants. My Lord of Leicester, you have a gentleman in your household called Varney?"

"Yes, gracious madam," replied Leicester; "I presented him to kiss your royal hand when you were last at Nonsuch."

"His outside was well enough," said the Queen, "but scarce so fair, I should have thought, as to have caused a maiden of honorable birth and hopes to barter her fame for his good looks. Yet so it is; this fellow of yours hath stolen the daughter of a good old Devonshire knight, Sir Hugh Robsart of Lidcote Hall, and she hath fled with him from her father's house. My Lord of Leicester, are you ill, that you look so deadly pale?"

"No, gracious madam," said Leicester, and it required every effort he could make to bring forth these few words.

"You are surely ill, my lord?" said Elizabeth, going towards him with hasty speech and hurried step, which indicated the deepest concern. "Call Masters — call our surgeon in ordinary. Or is it possible, Leicester," she continued, looking on him with a very gentle aspect — "can fear of my displeasure have wrought so deeply on thee? Doubt not for a moment, noble Dudley, that we could blame *thee* for the folly of thy retainer — thee, whose thoughts we know to be far otherwise employed! He that would climb the eagle's nest, my lords, cares not who are catching linnets at the foot of the precipice."

Leicester's confusion was so great, and, indeed, for the moment, so irresistibly overwhelming, that Elizabeth, after looking at him with a wondering eye, and receiving no intelligible answer to the unusual expressions of grace and affection which had escaped from her, shot her quick glance around the circle of courtiers, and reading, perhaps, in their faces something that accorded with her own awakened suspicions, she said suddenly, "Or is there more in this than we see, or than you, my lord, wish that we should see? Where is this Varney? Who saw him?"

"An it please your Grace," said Bowyer, "it is the same against whom I this instant closed the door of the presence-room."

"An it please me!" repeated Elizabeth, sharply, not at that moment in the humor of being pleased with anything. "It does *not* please me that he should pass saucily into my presence, or that you should exclude from it one who came to justify himself from an accusation. Call this Varney hither instantly; there is one Tressilian also mentioned in this petition; let them both come before us."

She was obeyed, and Tressilian and Varney appeared accordingly. Varney's first glance was at Leicester, his second at the

Queen. In the looks of the latter there appeared an approaching storm, and in the downcast countenance of his patron he could read no directions in what way he was to trim his vessel for the encounter; he then saw Tressilian, and at once perceived the peril of the situation in which he was placed. But Varney was as bold-faced and ready-witted as he was cunning and unscrupulous.

"Is it true, sirrah," said the Queen, with one of those searching looks which few had the audacity to resist, "that you have stolen to infamy a young lady of birth and breeding, the daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart of Lidcote Hall?"

Varney kneeled down, and replied, with a look of the most profound contrition — "There had been some love passages betwixt him and Mistress Amy Robsart."

Leicester's flesh quivered with indignation as he heard his dependant make this avowal, and for one moment he manned himself to step forward, and, bidding farewell to the court and the royal favor, confess the whole mystery of the secret marriage. But he looked at Sussex, and the idea of the triumphant smile which would clothe his cheek upon hearing the avowal sealed his lips. Meanwhile, the Queen proceeded in her examination of Varney.

"Love passages!" said she, echoing his last words; "what passages, thou knave? and why not ask the wench's hand from her father, if thou hadst any honesty in thy love for her?"

"An it please your Grace," said Varney, still on his knees, "I dared not do so, for her father had promised her hand to a gentleman of birth and honor — I will do him justice, though I know he bears me ill-will — one Master Edmund Tressilian, whom I now see in the presence."

"Soh!" replied the Queen; "and what was your right to make the simple fool break her worthy father's contract?"

"Madam," replied Varney, "it is in vain to plead the cause of human frailty before a judge to whom it is unknown, or that

of love to one who never yields to the passion ——” he paused an instant, and then added, in a very low and timid tone — “ which she inflicts upon all others.”

Elizabeth tried to frown, but smiled in her own despite, as she answered, “ Thou art a marvelously impudent knave. Art thou married to the girl ? ”

Leicester’s feeling became so complicated and so painfully intense, that it seemed to him as if his life was to depend on the answer made by Varney, who, after a moment’s real hesitation, answered, “ Yes.”

“ Thou false villain ! ” said Leicester, bursting forth into rage, yet unable to add another word to the sentence, which he had begun with such emphatic passion.

“ Nay, my lord,” said the Queen, “ we will, by your leave, stand between this fellow and your anger. We have not yet done with him. Knew your master, my Lord of Leicester, of this fair work of yours ? Speak truth, I command thee, and I will be thy warrant from danger on every quarter.”

“ Gracious madam,” said Varney, “ to speak Heaven’s truth, my lord was the cause of the whole matter.”

“ Thou villain, wouldst thou betray me ? ” said Leicester.

“ Speak on,” said the Queen, hastily, her cheek coloring and her eyes sparkling as she addressed Varney — “ speak on; here no commands are heard but mine.”

“ They are omnipotent, gracious madam,” replied Varney; “ and to you there can be no secrets. Yet I would not,” he added, looking around him, “ speak of my master’s concerns to other ears.”

“ Fall back, my lords,” said the Queen to those who surrounded her, “ and do you speak on. What hath the earl to do with this guilty intrigue of thine ? See, fellow, that thou beliest him not ! ”

“ Far be it from me to traduce my noble patron,” replied Varney; “ yet I am compelled to own that some deep, over-

whelming, yet secret feeling hath of late dwelt in my lord's mind, hath abstracted him from the cares of the household, which he was wont to govern with such religious strictness, and hath left us opportunities to do follies, of which the shame, as in this case, partly falls upon our patron. Without this, I had not had means or leisure to commit the folly which has drawn on me his displeasure, the heaviest to endure by me which I could by any means incur — saving always the yet more dreaded resentment of your Grace."

"And in this sense, and no other, hath he been accessory to thy fault?" said Elizabeth.

"Surely, madam, in no other," replied Varney; "but, since somewhat hath chanced to him, he can scarce be called his own man. Look at him, madam, how pale and trembling he stands — how unlike his usual majesty of manner; yet what has he to fear from aught I can say to your Highness? Ah! madam, since he received that fatal packet!"

"What packet, and from whence?" said the Queen, eagerly.

"From whence, madam, I cannot guess; but I am so near to his person that I know he has ever since worn, suspended around his neck and next to his heart, that lock of hair which sustains a small golden jewel shaped like a heart. He speaks to it when alone; he parts not from it when he sleeps. No heathen ever worshiped an idol with such devotion."

"Thou art a prying knave to watch thy master so closely," said Elizabeth, blushing, but not with anger; "and a tattling knave to tell over again his fooleries. What color might the braid of hair be that thou pratest of?"

Varney replied, "A poet, madam, might call it a thread from the golden web wrought by Minerva; but, to my thinking, it was paler than even the purest gold — more like the last parting sunbeam of the softest day of spring."

"Why, you are a poet yourself, Master Varney," said the Queen, smiling; "but I have not genius quick enough to follow

your rare metaphors. Look round these ladies — is there — is there here, in this presence, any lady, the color of whose hair reminds thee of that braid ? ”

Varney looked round the presence-chamber, his eye traveling from one lady to another, until at length it rested upon the Queen herself, but with an aspect of the deepest veneration. “ I see no tresses,” he said, “ in this presence, worthy of such similes, unless where I dare not look on them.”

“ How, sir knave,” said the Queen, “ dare you intimate —— ”

“ Nay, madam,” replied Varney, shading his eyes with his hand, “ it was the beams of the May-day sun that dazzled my weak eyes.”

“ Go to — go to,” said the Queen, “ thou art a foolish fellow,” and turning quickly from him, she walked up to Leicester.

Intense curiosity, mingled with all the various hopes, fears, and passions which influence court faction, had occupied the presence-chamber during the Queen’s conference with Varney. Leicester, who saw all around wishing or fearing his advancement or his fall, forgot all that love had previously dictated, and saw nothing for the instant but the favor or disgrace which depended on the nod of Elizabeth and the fidelity of Varney. He summoned himself hastily, and prepared to play his part in the scene which was like to ensue, when, as he judged from the glances which the Queen threw towards him, Varney’s communications, be they what they might, were operating in his favor. Elizabeth did not long leave him in doubt; for the more than favor with which she accosted him decided his triumph in the eyes of his rival, and of the assembled court of England. “ Thou hast a prating servant of this same Varney, my lord,” she said; “ it is lucky you trust him with nothing that can hurt you in our opinion, for, believe me, he would keep no counsel.”

“ From your Highness,” said Leicester, dropping gracefully on one knee, “ it were treason he should. I would that my

heart itself lay before you, barer than the tongue of any servant could strip it."

"What, my lord," said Elizabeth, looking kindly upon him, "is there no one little corner over which you would wish to spread a veil? Ah! I see you are confused at the question, and your Queen knows she should not look too deeply into her servants' motives for their faithful duty, lest she see what might, or at least ought to, displease her."

Relieved by these last words, Leicester broke out into a torrent of expressions of deep and passionate attachment, which perhaps, at that moment, were not altogether fictitious. The mingled emotions which had at first overcome him, had now given way to the energetic vigor with which he had determined to support his place in the Queen's favor; and never did he seem to Elizabeth more eloquent, more handsome, more interesting, than while, kneeling at her feet, he conjured her to strip him of all his power, but to leave him the name of her servant. "Take from the poor Dudley," he exclaimed, "all that your bounty has made him, and bid him be the poor gentleman he was when your Grace first shone on him; leave him no more than his cloak and his sword, but let him still boast he has — what in word or deed he never forfeited — the regard of his adored Queen and mistress!"

"No, Dudley!" said Elizabeth, raising him with one hand, while she extended the other that he might kiss it; "Elizabeth had not forgotten that, whilst you were a poor gentleman, despoiled of your hereditary rank, she was as poor a princess, and that in her cause you then ventured all that oppression had left you — your life and honor. Rise, my lord, and let my hand go. Rise, and be what you have ever been, the grace of our court and the support of our throne. And so help me God," she added, turning to the audience, who, with various feelings, witnessed this interesting scene — "so help me God, gentlemen, as I think never sovereign had a truer servant than I have in this noble earl!"

A murmur of assent arose from the Leicestrian faction, which the friends of Sussex dared not oppose. They remained with their eyes fixed on the ground, dismayed as well as mortified by the public and absolute triumph of their opponents. Leicester's first use of the familiarity to which the Queen had so publicly restored him was to ask her commands concerning Varney's offence. "Although," he said, "the fellow deserves nothing from me but displeasure, yet, might I presume to intercede ——"

"In truth, we had forgotten his matter," said the Queen; "and it was ill done of us, who owe justice to our meanest as well as to our highest subject. We are pleased, my lord, that you were the first to recall the matter to our memory. Where is Tressilian, the accuser? let him come before us."

Tressilian appeared, and made a low and befitting reverence. His person, as we have elsewhere observed, had an air of grace, and even of nobleness, which did not escape Queen Elizabeth's critical observation. She looked at him with attention, as he stood before her unabashed, but with an air of the deepest dejection.

"I cannot but grieve for this gentleman," she said to Leicester. "I have inquired concerning him, and his presence confirms what I heard, that he is a scholar and a soldier, well accomplished both in arts and arms. I had said now, to judge by the eye, there was no comparison to be held betwixt your follower and this gentleman. But Varney is a well-spoken fellow, and, to speak truth, that goes far with us of the weaker sex. Look you, Master Tressilian, a bolt lost is not a bow broken. Forget, good sir, this lady light o' love; teach your affection to see with a wiser eye. For this dame's father, we can make his grief the less by advancing his son-in-law to such station as may enable him to give an honorable support to his bride. Thou shalt not be forgotten thyself, Tressilian; follow our court, and thou shalt see that a true Troilus hath some claim on our grace."

As Tressilian kept the posture of one who would willingly be

heard, though, at the same time, expressive of the deepest reverence, the Queen added with some impatience — “What would the man have? The wench cannot wed both of you? She has made her election — not a wise one perchance, but she is Varney’s wedded wife.”

“My suit should sleep there, most gracious sovereign,” said Tressilian, “and with my suit my revenge. But I hold this Varney’s word no good warrant for the truth.”

“Had that doubt been elsewhere urged,” answered Varney, “my sword ——”

“*Thy* sword!” interrupted Tressilian, scornfully; “with her Grace’s leave, my sword shall show ——”

“Peace, you knaves — both!” said the Queen; “know you where you are? This comes of your feuds, my lords,” she added, looking towards Leicester and Sussex. She then paused a minute, and resumed in a milder tone, “I must do justice betwixt the bold and mutinous knaves notwithstanding. My Lord of Leicester, will you warrant with your honor — that is, to the best of your belief — that your servant speaks truth in saying he hath married this Amy Robsart?”

This was a home-thrust, and had nearly staggered Leicester. But he had now gone too far to recede, and answered, after a moment’s hesitation, “To the best of my belief — indeed, on my certain knowledge — she is a wedded wife.”

“Gracious madam, said Tressilian, “may I yet request to know when, and under what circumstances, this alleged marriage ——”

“Out, sirrah,” answered the Queen — “*alleged* marriage! Have you not the word of this illustrious earl to warrant the truth of what his servant says? We will look into the matter ourself more at leisure. My Lord of Leicester, I trust you remember we mean to taste the good cheer of your Castle of Kenilworth on this week ensuing; we will pray you to bid our good and valued friend the Earl of Sussex to hold company with us there.”

"If the noble Earl of Sussex," said Leicester, bowing to his rival with the easiest and with the most graceful courtesy, "will so far honor my poor house, I will hold it an additional proof of the amicable regard it is your Grace's desire we should entertain towards each other."

Sussex was more embarrassed. "I should," said he, "madam, be but a clog on your gayer hours, since my late severe illness."

"And have you been indeed so very ill?" said Elizabeth, looking at him with more attention than before; "you are in faith strangely altered, and deeply am I grieved to see it. But be of good cheer; we will ourselves look after the health of so valued a servant, and to whom we owe so much. Masters shall order your diet; and that we ourselves may see that he is obeyed, you must attend us in this progress to Kenilworth."

This was said so peremptorily, and at the same time with so much kindness, that Sussex, however unwilling to become the guest of his rival, had no resource but to bow low to the Queen in obedience to her commands, and to express to Leicester, with blunt courtesy, though mingled with embarrassment, his acceptance of his invitation. As the earls exchanged compliments on the occasion, the Queen said to her high treasurer, "We hold both to be near and dear to us, and will with impartiality employ both in honorable service for the weal of our kingdom. But we will break their farther conference at present. My Lords of Sussex and Leicester, we have a word more with you. Tressilian and Varney are near your persons; you will see that they attend you at Kenilworth. Varney, thy wife must be at Kenilworth, and forthcoming at my order. My Lord of Leicester, we expect you will look to this."

The earl and his follower bowed low, and raised their heads, without daring to look at the Queen or at each other; for both felt at the instant as if the nets and toils which their own falsehood had woven were in the act of closing around them. The Queen, however, observed not their confusion, but proceeded to

say, " My Lords of Sussex and Leicester, we require your presence at the privy council to be presently held, where matters of importance are to be debated. We will then take the water for our divertisement, and you, my lords, will attend us."

And so terminated this celebrated audience, in which, as throughout her life, Elizabeth united the occasional caprice of her sex with that sense and sound policy in which neither man nor woman ever excelled her.

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the brief interval that took place betwixt the dismissal of the audience and the sitting of the privy council, Leicester had time to reflect that he had that morning sealed his own fate. The Queen's favor, to preserve which he had made such sacrifices, must now be secured by all means and at all hazards; it was the only plank which he could cling to in the tempest. He must settle himself, therefore, to the task of not only preserving, but augmenting, the Queen's partiality. He must be the favorite of Elizabeth, or a man utterly shipwrecked in fortune and in honor.

In this mood, the earl of Leicester that day assumed his chair at the council-table of Elizabeth; and when the hours of business were over, in this same mood did he occupy an honored place near her during her pleasure-excursion on the Thames.

Never was more anxious and ready way made for " my Lord of Leicester " than as he passed through the crowded ante-rooms to go towards the riverside, in order to attend her Majesty to her barge; never was the voice of the ushers louder, to " Make room — make room for the noble earl; " never were these signals more promptly and reverently obeyed; never were more anxious eyes turned on him to obtain a glance of favor, or even of mere recognition, while the heart of many a humble follower throbbed

betwixt the desire to offer his congratulations and the fear of intruding himself on the notice of one so infinitely above him.

On the other hand, never did Leicester return the general greeting with such ready and condescending courtesy. For all he had a bow, a smile at least, and often a kind word. Most of these were addressed to courtiers, whose names have long gone down the tide of oblivion; but some to such as sound strangely in our ears, when connected with the ordinary matters of human life, above which the gratitude of posterity has long elevated them. A few of Leicester's interlocutory sentences ran as follows:

"Master Edmund Spenser, touching your Irish petition, I would willingly aid you, from my love to the Muses; but thou hast nettled the lord treasurer."

"My lord," said the poet, "were I permitted to explain ——"

"Come to my lodging, Edmund," answered the earl — "not to-morrow or next day, but soon. Ha, Will Shakespeare — wild Will! thou hast given my nephew, Philip Sidney, love-powder: he cannot sleep without thy *Venus and Adonis* under his pillow! We will have thee hanged for the veriest wizard in Europe."

The *player* bowed, and the earl nodded and passed on — so that age would have told the tale; in ours, perhaps, we might say the immortal had done homage to the mortal.

Then the earl was approached, with several fantastic congees, by a person quaintly dressed in a doublet of black velvet, curiously slashed and pinked with crimson satin. A long cock's feather in the velvet bonnet which he held in his hand, and an enormous ruff, stiffened to the extremity of the absurd taste of the times, joined with a sharp, lively, conceited expression of countenance, seemed to body forth a vain, hare-brained coxcomb and small wit; while the rod he held, and an assumption of formal authority, appeared to express some sense of official consequence, which qualified the natural pertness of his manner.

" Good even to you, Master Robert Laneham," said Leicester, and seemed desirous to pass forward without farther speech.

" I have a suit to your noble lordship," said the figure, boldly following him.

" And what is it, good master keeper of the council-chamber door ? "

" Simply," answered Laneham, " that your lordship would be, as heretofore, my good lord, and procure me license to attend the summer progress unto your lordship's most beautiful and all-to-be unmatched Castle of Kenilworth."

" Come to Kenilworth, if you list; there will be store of fools there besides, and so you will be fitted."

" Nay, an there be fools, my lord," replied Laneham, with much glee, " I warrant I will make sport among them. But I have another singular favor to beseech of your honor. I have a wife as curious as her grandmother, who eat the apple. Now, take her with me I may not, her Highness's orders being so strict against the officers bringing with them their wives in a progress, and so lumbering the court with womankind. But what I would crave of your lordship is, to find room for her in some mummary or pretty pageant, in disguise, as it were, so that, not being known for my wife, there may be no offence."

" The foul fiend seize ye both! " said Leicester, stung into uncontrollable passion by the recollections which this speech excited. " Why stop you me with such follies ? "

The terrified clerk of the chamber door, astonished at the burst of resentment he had so unconsciously produced, dropped his staff of office from his hand, and gazed on the incensed earl with a foolish face of wonder and terror, which instantly recalled Leicester to himself.

" I meant but to try if thou hadst the audacity which befits thine office," said he, hastily. " Come to Kenilworth, and bring the devil with thee if thou wilt. Here is a crown for thee," added the earl; " make me rid of thee — the great bell rings."

Leicester moved hastily on, neglecting the courtesies he had hitherto dispensed so liberally, and hurrying through the courtly crowd, until he paused in a small withdrawing-room, into which he plunged to draw a moment's breath unobserved and in seclusion.

"What am I now," he said to himself, "that am thus jaded by the words of a mean, weather-beaten, goose-brained gull! Conscience, thou art a bloodhound, whose growl wakes as readily at the paltry stir of a rat or mouse as at the step of a lion. Can I not quit myself, by one bold stroke, of a state so irksome, so unhonored? What if I kneel to Elizabeth, and, owning the whole, throw myself on her mercy?"

As he pursued this train of thought, the door of the apartment opened, and Varney rushed in.

"Thank God, my lord, that I have found you!" was his exclamation.

"Thank the devil, whose agent thou art," was the earl's reply.

"Thank whom you will, my lord," said Varney; "but hasten to the water-side. The Queen is on board, and asks for you."

"Go, say I am taken suddenly ill," replied Leicester; "for, by Heaven, my brain can sustain this no longer!"

"I may well say so," said Varney, with bitterness of expression, "for your place, ay, and mine, who, as your master of the horse, was to have attended your lordship, is already filled up in the Queen's barge. The new minion, Walter Raleigh, and our old acquaintance, Tressilian, were called for to fill our places just as I hastened away to seek you."

"Thou art a devil, Varney," said Leicester, hastily; "but thou hast the mastery for the present: I follow thee."

The Queen's barge was on the very point of putting off; the seat allotted to Leicester in the stern, and that to his master of the horse on the bow, of the boat being already filled up. But on Leicester's approach there was a pause, as if the bargemen anticipated some alteration in their company. The angry spot

was, however, on the Queen's cheek, as in that cold tone with which superiors endeavor to veil their internal agitation, while speaking to those before whom it would be derogation to express it, she pronounced the chilling words — "We have waited, my Lord of Leicester."

"Madam and most gracious princess," said Leicester, "I came to your presence a doubting and an accused subject; your goodness penetrated the clouds of defamation, and restored me to my honor, and, what is yet dearer, to your favor — it is wonderful, though for me it is most unhappy, that my master of the horse should have found me in a state which scarce permitted me to make the exertion necessary to follow him to this place, when one glance of your Highness, although, alas! an angry one, has had power to do that for me in which Esculapius might have failed?"

"How is this?" said Elizabeth, hastily, looking at Varney; "hath your lord been ill?"

"Something of a fainting fit," answered the ready-witted Varney, "as your Grace may observe from his present condition. My lord's haste would not permit me leisure even to bring his dress into order."

"It matters not," said Elizabeth, as she gazed on the noble face and form of Leicester, to which even the strange mixture of passions by which he had been so lately agitated gave additional interest; "make room for my noble lord. Your place, Master Varney, has been filled up; you must find a seat in another barge."

Varney bowed and withdrew.

Leicester seated himself in his place in the barge, and close to the sovereign. He turned the discourse on shows, banquets, pageants, and on the character of those by whom these gay scenes were then frequented. He mimicked with ready accent the manners of the affected or the clownish, and made his own graceful tone and manner seem doubly such when he resumed it.

Foreign countries — their customs, their manners, the rules of their courts, the fashions, and even the dress, of their ladies — were equally his theme; and seldom did he conclude without conveying some compliment, always couched in delicacy and expressed with propriety, to the Virgin Queen, her court, and her government. Thus passed the conversation during this pleasure voyage, seconded by the rest of the attendants upon the royal person, in gay discourse, varied by remarks upon ancient classics and modern authors, and enriched by maxims of deep policy and sound morality by the statesmen and sages who sate around, and mixed wisdom with the lighter talk of a female court.

When they returned to the palace, Elizabeth accepted, or rather selected, the arm of Leicester to support her from the stairs where they landed to the great gate. It even seemed to him that, during this short passage, she leaned on him somewhat more than the slippiness of the way necessarily demanded. Certainly her actions and words combined to express a degree of favor which, even in his proudest days, he had not till then attained. His rival, indeed, was repeatedly graced by the Queen's notice; but it was in a manner that seemed to flow less from spontaneous inclination than as extorted by a sense of his merit.

The nobles and courtiers who had attended the Queen on her pleasure expedition were invited, with royal hospitality, to a splendid banquet in the hall of the palace. The table was not, indeed, graced by the presence of the sovereign; for, agreeable to her idea of what was at once modest and dignified, the Maiden Queen on such occasions was wont to take in private, or with one or two favorite ladies, her light and temperate meal. After a moderate interval, the court again met in the splendid gardens of the palace; and it was while thus engaged that the Queen suddenly asked a lady, who was near to her both in place and favor, what had become of the young Squire Lack-Cloak.

The Lady Paget answered, "She had seen Master Raleigh but two or three minutes since, standing at the window of a small pavilion or pleasure-house, which looked out on the Thames, and writing on the glass with a diamond ring."

"That ring," said the Queen, "was a small token I gave him, to make amends for his spoiled mantle. Come, Paget, let us see what use he has made of it, for I can see through him already. He is a marvelously sharp-witted spirit."

They went to the spot, within sight of which, but at some distance, the young cavalier still lingered, as the fowler watches the net which he has set. The Queen approached the window on which Raleigh had used her gift to inscribe the following line:—

"Fain would I climb, but that I fear to fall."

The Queen smiled, read it twice over, once with deliberation to Lady Paget, and once again to herself. "It is a pretty beginning," she said, after the consideration of a moment or two; "but methinks the muse hath deserted the young wit at the very outset of his task. It were good-natured, were it not, Lady Paget, to complete it for him? Might not the answer, for fault of a better, run thus:—

If thy mind fail thee, do not climb at all?"

The dame of honor uttered an exclamation of joy and surprise at so happy a termination; and certainly a worse has been applauded, even when coming from a less distinguished author.

The Queen, thus encouraged, took off a diamond ring, and wrote her own line beneath that of Raleigh.

She then left the pavilion; but, retiring slowly, and often looking back, she could see the young cavalier steal, with the flight of a lapwing, towards the place where he had seen her make a pause. "She stayed but to observe," as she said, "that her train had taken;" and then, laughing at the circumstance with the Lady Paget, she took the way slowly towards the palace.

Raleigh returned to Sussex and his retinue, then on the point of embarking to go up the river, his heart beating high with gratified pride and with hope of future distinction.

The reverence due to the person of the earl prevented any notice being taken of the reception he had met with at court, until they had landed, and the household were assembled in the great hall at Say's Court; while that lord, exhausted by his late illness and the fatigues of the day, had retired to his chamber, demanding the attendance of Wayland, his successful physician. Tressilian instantly left the hall, and sending for Wayland Smith was surprised, when he came, to observe the emotion of his countenance.

"What is the matter with you, Smith?" said Tressilian; "have you seen the devil?"

"Worse, sir — worse," replied Wayland, "I have seen a basilisk."

"In God's name, speak sense," said Tressilian, "and say what you mean!"

"I have seen my old master," said the artist. "Last night, a friend whom I had acquired took me to see the palace clock, judging me to be curious in such works of art. At the window of a turret next to the clock house I saw my old master."

"Thou must needs have been mistaken," said Tressilian.

"I was not mistaken," said Wayland. "He that once hath his features by heart would know him amongst a million. He was anticly habited; but he cannot disguise himself from me, God be praised! as I can from him. I will not, however, tempt Providence by remaining within his ken. I must away to-morrow; for, as we stand together, it were death to me to remain within reach of him."

"But the Earl of Sussex?" said Tressilian.

"He is in little danger from what he has hitherto taken; but let him beware of a relapse."

"And how is that to be guarded against?" said Tressilian.

"Only by such caution as you would use against the devil," answered Wayland. "Let my lord's clerk of the kitchen kill his lord's meat himself, and dress it himself, using no spice but what he procures from the surest hands. Let the sewer¹ serve it up himself, and let the master of my lord's household see that both clerk and sewer taste the dishes which the one dresses and the other serves. Let my lord use no perfumes which come not from well accredited persons — no unguents — no pomades. Let him, on no account, drink with strangers, or eat fruit with them. Especially, let him observe such caution if he goes to Kenilworth; the excuse of his illness, and his being under diet, will, and must, cover the strangeness of such practice."

"And thou," said Tressilian, "what dost thou think to make of thyself?"

"France, Spain, either India, East or West, shall be my refuge," said Wayland, "ere I venture my life by residing within ken of Doboobie, Demetrius, or whatever else he calls himself for the time."

"Well," said Tressilian, "this happens not inopportunately. I had business for you in Berkshire, but in the opposite extremity to the place where thou art known; and ere thou hadst found out this new reason for living private, I had settled to send thee thither upon a secret embassy."

The artist expressed himself willing to receive his commands, and Tressilian, knowing he was well acquainted with the outline of his business at court, frankly explained to him the whole, mentioned an agreement which he had made with Giles Gosling on the night of his departure from that worthy's hostelry, and told what had that day been averred in the presence-chamber by Varney, and supported by Leicester.

"Thou seest," he added, "that, in the circumstances in which I am placed, it behooves me to keep a narrow watch on

¹ An upper servant who sets the dishes on the table.

the motions of these unprincipled men, Varney and his accomplices, Foster and Lambourne, as well as on those of my Lord Leicester himself, who, I suspect, is partly a deceiver, and not altogether the deceived in that matter. Here is my ring, as a pledge to Giles Gosling, who promised me to keep watch on the motions of those at Cumnor Place, and here is, besides, gold, which shall be trebled if thou serve me faithfully. Away down to Cumnor, and see what happens there."

Wayland Smith accordingly made his farewell visit to the Earl of Sussex, dictated instructions as to his regimen and precautions concerning his diet, and left Say's Court without waiting for morning.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Leicester returned to his lodging, after a day so important and so harrassing, he seemed to experience as much fatigue as a mariner after a perilous storm. He spoke not a word while his chamberlain exchanged his rich court mantle for a furred night robe, and when this officer signified that Master Varney desired to speak with his lordship, he replied only by a sullen nod. Varney, however, entered, accepting this signal as a permission, and the chamberlain withdrew.

"May I congratulate your lordship," he said, "on the deserved superiority you have this day attained over your most formidable rival?"

Leicester raised his head, and answered sadly, but without anger, "Thou, Varney, whose ready invention has involved me in a web of most mean and perilous falsehood, knowest best what small reason there is for gratulation on the subject."

"Do you blame me, my lord," said Varney, "for not betraying, on the first push, the secret on which your fortunes depended, and which you have so oft and so earnestly recommended to my safe keeping? Your lordship was present in person, and might

have contradicted me and ruined yourself by an avowal of the truth."

"I cannot deny it, Varney," said the earl, rising and walking across the room; "my own ambition has been traitor to my love."

"Say, rather, my lord, that your love has been traitor to your greatness, and barred you from such a prospect of honor and power as the world cannot offer to any other. To make my honored lady a countess, you have missed the chance of being yourself ——"

He paused, and seemed unwilling to complete the sentence.

"Of being myself *what*?" demanded Leicester; "speak out thy meaning, Varney."

"Of being yourself a KING, my lord," replied Varney; "and King of England to boot! It is no treason to our Queen to say so. It would have chanced by her obtaining that which all true subjects wish her — a lusty, noble, and gallant husband."

"Thou ravest, Varney," answered Leicester. "Besides, our times have seen enough to make men loathe the crown matrimonial which men take from their wives' lap. There was Darnley of Scotland."

"He!" said Varney — "a gull, a fool, who suffered himself to be fired off into the air like a rocket on a rejoicing-day. Had Mary had the hap to have wedded the noble earl once destined to share her throne, she had experienced a husband of different metal; and her husband had found in her a wife as complying and loving as the mate of the meanest squire, who follows the hounds a-horseback, and holds her husband's bridle as he mounts."

"It might have been as thou sayest, Varney," said Leicester. "But I would be alone. Leave me, and place my steel casket on the table. Be within summons."

Varney retired; and the earl, opening the window of his apartment, looked out long and anxiously upon the brilliant host of stars which glimmered in the splendor of a summer firmament.

The words burst from him as at unawares — “ I had never more need that the heavenly bodies should befriend me, for my earthly path is darkened and confused.”

It is well known that the age reposed a deep confidence in the vain predictions of judicial astrology, and Leicester was not in this respect superior to his time; but, on the contrary, was remarkable for the encouragement which he gave to the professors of this pretended science. With heedful precaution to see that it had not been opened, or its locks tampered with, Leicester applied a key to the steel casket, and drew from it, first, a parcel of gold pieces, which he put into a silk purse; then a parchment inscribed with planetary signs, and the lines and calculations used in framing horoscopes, on which he gazed intently for a few moments; and, lastly, took forth a large key, which, lifting aside the tapestry, he applied to a little concealed door in the corner of the apartment, and, opening it, disclosed a stair constructed in the thickness of the wall.

“ Alasco,” said the earl, with a voice raised, yet no higher raised than to be heard by the inhabitant of the small turret to which the stair conducted — “ Alasco, I say, descend.”

“ I come, my lord,” answered a voice from above. The foot of an aged man was heard slowly descending the narrow stair, and Alasco entered the earl's apartment. The astrologer was a little man, and seemed much advanced in age, for his beard was long and white, and reached over his black doublet down to his silken girdle. His hair was of the same venerable hue. But his eyebrows were as dark as the keen and piercing black eyes which they shaded. His cheek was still fresh and ruddy, and the eyes we have mentioned resembled those of a rat in acuteness, and even fierceness, of expression. His manner was not without a sort of dignity; and the interpreter of the stars, though respectful, seemed altogether at his ease, and even assumed a tone of instruction and command in conversing with the prime favorite of Elizabeth.

"Your prognostications have failed, Alasco," said the earl, when they had exchanged salutations. "He is recovering."

"My son," replied the astrologer, "let me remind you, I warranted not his death."

"Of what avail, then, is your mystery?" inquired the earl.

"Of much, my son," replied the old man, "since it can show the natural and probable course of events, although that course moves in subordination to an Higher Power. Thus, in reviewing the horoscope which your lordship subjected to my skill, you will observe that Saturn cannot but denote long and dangerous sickness, the issue whereof is in the will of Heaven, though death may probably be inferred. Yet, if I knew the name of the party, I would erect another scheme."

"His name is a secret," said the earl; "yet, I must own, thy prognostication hath not been unfaithful. He has been sick, and dangerously so — not, however, to death. But hast thou again cast my horoscope, as Varney directed thee?"

"My art stands at your command," said the old man; "and here, my son, is the map of thy fortunes, brilliant in aspect as ever beamed from those blessed signs whereby our life is influenced, yet not unchequered with fears, difficulties, and dangers."

"My lot were more than mortal were it otherwise," said the earl; "proceed, father, and believe you speak with one ready to undergo his destiny in action and in passion as may beseem a noble of England."

"Thy courage to do and to suffer must be wound up yet a strain higher," said the old man. "The stars intimate yet a prouder title, yet an higher rank. It is for thee to guess their meaning, not for me to name it."

The earl made two or three strides though the apartment, with his hand outstretched, as one who follows the beckoning signal of some phantom, waving him on to deeds of high import. As he turned, however, he caught the eye of the astrologer fixed on him, while an observing glance of the most shrewd penetration

shot from under the penthouse of his shaggy dark eyebrows. Leicester's haughty and suspicious soul at once caught fire; he darted towards the old man from the further end of the lofty apartment, only standing still when his extended hand was within a foot of the astrologer's body.

"Wretch!" he said, "if you dare to palter with me, I will have your skin stripped from your living flesh! Confess thou hast been hired to deceive and betray me — that thou art a cheat, and I thy silly prey and booty!"

"What means this violence, my lord?" the old man answered, "or in what can I have deserved it at your hand?"

"Give me proof," said the earl, vehemently, "that you have not tampered with mine enemies."

"My lord," replied the old man, with dignity, "you can have no better proof than that which you yourself elected. In that turret I have spent the last twenty-four hours, under the key which has been in your own custody. The hours of darkness I have spent in gazing on the heavenly bodies with these dim eyes, and during those of light I have toiled this aged brain to complete the calculation arising from their combinations. Earthly food I have not tasted — earthly voice I have not heard. You are yourself aware I had no means of doing so; and yet I tell you that within these twenty-four hours your star has become predominant in the horizon, and either the bright book of heaven speaks false or there must have been a proportionate revolution in your fortunes upon earth. Wherefore this distrust, then, my son?"

"Peace, father," answered Leicester, "I have erred in doubting thee. But speak rather to the present purpose. Amid these bright promises, thou hast said there was a threatening aspect. Can thy skill tell whence, or by whose means, such danger seems to impend?"

"Thus far only," answered the astrologer, "does my art enable me to answer your query. The infortune is threatened

through means of a youth, and, as I think, a rival; but I can give no farther indication respecting him, save that he comes from the western quarter."

"The western — ha!" replied Leicester, "it is enough; the tempest does indeed brew in that quarter. Cornwall and Devon — Raleigh and Tressilian. Father, if I have done thy skill injustice, I will make thee a lordly recompense."

He took a purse of gold from the strong casket which stood before him. "Have thou double the recompense which Varney promised. Be faithful — be secret. Here, Varney, conduct this venerable man to thine own lodging; tend him heedfully in all things, but see that he holds communication with no one."

Varney bowed, and the astrologer kissed the earl's hand in token of adieu, and followed the master of the horse to another apartment, in which were placed wine and refreshments for his use.

The astrologer sat down to his repast, while Varney shut two doors with great precaution; and then sitting down opposite to the sage, began to question him.

"Saw you my signal from the court beneath?"

"I did," said Alasco, "and shaped the horoscope accordingly."

"And it passed upon the patron without challenge?" continued Varney.

"Not without challenge," replied the old man, "but it did pass; and I added, as before agreed, danger from a discovered secret and a western youth."

"Sage interpreter of the stars," said Varney, abruptly, "I can tell you more of your own fortune than plan or figure can show. You must be gone from hence forthwith."

"I will not," said Alasco, peevishly. "I have been too much hurried up and down of late; I must enjoy my liberty, and pursue my studies, which are of more import than the fate of fifty statesmen and favorites, that rise and burst like bubbles in the atmosphere of a court."

“ At your pleasure,” said Varney, with a sneer which habit had rendered familiar to his features; “ you may enjoy liberty and your studies until the daggers of Sussex’s followers are clashing within your doublet, and against your ribs.” The old man turned pale, and Varney proceeded. “ Wot you not he hath offered a reward for the arch-quack and poison-vender, Demetrius, who sold certain precious spices to his lordship’s cook? What! turn you pale, old friend? Why, hark thee, we will have thee down to an old house of mine in the country, where thou shalt live with a hobnailed slave, whom thy alchemy may convert into ducats, for to such conversion alone is thy art serviceable. Had the seasoning which spiced Sussex’s broth wrought more surely, I would have thought better of the chemical science thou dost boast so highly. How came thine art to fail thee at this great emergency? ”

“ I know but one medicine,” replied the old man, “ that could have saved the earl’s life; and as no man living in England knows that antidote save myself, moreover, as the ingredients, one of them in particular, are scarce possible to be come by, I must needs suppose his escape was owing to such a constitution of lungs and vital parts as was never before bound up in a body of clay.”

“ There was some talk of a quack who waited on him,” said Varney, after a moment’s reflection. “ Are you sure there is no one in England who has this secret of thine? ”

“ One man there was,” said the doctor, “ once my servant, who might have stolen this of me, with one or two other secrets of art. But content you, Master Varney, he pries into no mysteries more, I warrant you; for, as I well believe, he hath been wafted to heaven on the wing of a fiery dragon. Peace be with him! But in this retreat of mine, shall I have the use of mine elaboratory? ”

“ Of a whole workshop, man,” said Varney; “ for a reverend father abbot, who was fain to give place to bluff King Hal and

some of his courtiers a score of years since, had a chemist's complete apparatus, which he was obliged to leave behind him to his successors. Thy first task must be to prepare some of the manna of St. Nicholas when thou get'st down to my little sequestered retreat yonder."

"I will make no more of that dose," said the alchemist, resolutely.

"Then," said the master of the horse, "thou shalt be hanged for what thou hast made already. E'en bend to thy destiny, and make us an ounce or two of this same stuff, which cannot prejudice above one or two individuals, in order to gain lifetime to discover the universal medicine, which shall clear away all mortal diseases at once. Hast thou not told me that a moderate portion of thy drug hath mild effects, no ways ultimately dangerous to the human frame, but which produces depression of spirits, nausea, headache, an unwillingness to change of place — even such a state of temper as would keep a bird from flying out of a cage were the door left open?"

"I have said so, and it is true," said the alchemist; "this effect will it produce, and the bird who partakes of it in such proportion shall sit for a season drooping on her perch, without thinking either of the free blue sky or of the fair greenwood."

"And this without danger to life?" said Varney, somewhat anxiously.

"Ay, so that proportion and measure be not exceeded; and so that one who knows the nature of the manna be ever near to watch the symptoms, and succor in case of need."

"Thou shalt regulate the whole," said Varney; "thy reward shall be princely, if thou exceedest not the due proportion, to the prejudice of her health; otherwise thy punishment shall be as signal."

"The prejudice of *her* health!" repeated Alasco; "it is, then, a woman I am to use my skill upon?"

"No, thou fool," replied Varney; "said I not it was a bird

— a reclaimed linnet, whose pipe might soothe a hawk when in mid stoop ? This caged bird is in the case of being commanded down to yonder Kenilworth revels; and it is most expedient — most needful — most necessary that she fly not thither. Understand me — a slight illness, sufficient to take away the desire of removing from thence, and to make such of your wise fraternity as may be called in to aid recommend a quiet residence at home, will, in one word, be esteemed good service, and remunerated as such.”

“ I am not to be asked to affect the House of Life ? ” said the chemist.

“ On the contrary, we will have thee hanged if thou dost,” replied Varney. “ Why, man, for what dost thou take me ? ”

The old man rose, and taking a light, walked towards the end of the apartment, where was a door that led to the small sleeping-room destined for his reception during the night. At the door he turned round, and slowly repeated Varney’s question ere he answered it. “ For what do I take thee, Richard Varney ? Why, for a worse devil than I have been myself. But I am in your toils, and I must serve you till my term be out.”

“ Well, well,” answered Varney, hastily, “ be stirring with gray light. It may be we shall not need thy medicine. Do nought till I myself come down. Michael Lambourne shall guide you to the place of your destination.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE public room of the Black Bear at Cumnor, to which the scene of our story now returns, boasted, on the evening which we treat of, no ordinary assemblage of guests. There had been a fair in the neighborhood, and the cutting mercer of Abingdon, with other friends and customers of Giles Gosling, had already

formed their wonted circle around the evening fire, and were talking over the news of the day.

A lively, bustling, arch fellow, with pack and oaken ell-wand, studded duly with brass points, occupied a good deal of the attention, and furnished much of the amusement, of the evening. The peddlers of those days, it must be remembered, were men of far greater importance than the degenerate and degraded hawkers of our modern times. It was by means of these walking salesmen that the country trade, in the finer manufactures used in female dress particularly, was almost entirely carried on; and if a merchant of this description arrived at the dignity of traveling with a pack horse, he was a person of no small consequence, and company for the most substantial yeoman or franklin whom he might meet in his wanderings.

The peddler of whom we speak bore, accordingly, an active and unrebuked share in the merriment to which the rafters of the bonny Black Bear of Cumnor resounded. He had his broad laugh with mine host, and his jest upon dashing Master Goldthred, who was the general butt of the evening. The peddler and he were closely engaged in a dispute, and mine host had just winked to the guests around him, as who should say, "You will have mirth presently, my masters," when the trampling of horses was heard in the courtyard. Out tumbled Will Hostler, John Tapster, and all the militia of the inn. Out into the yard sallied mine host himself also, to do fitting salutation to his new guests; and presently returned, ushering into the apartment his own worthy nephew, Michael Lambourne, pretty tolerably drunk, and having under his escort the astrologer. "A gallon of your best, uncle," shouted Lambourne, "and let it go round to the health of the noble Earl of Leicester!"

"With all my heart, kinsman," said mine host, who obviously wished to be rid of him; "but are you to stand shot to all this good liquor?"

"Question my means, nuncle?" he said, producing a handful

of mixed gold and silver pieces — “ question Mexico and Peru — question the Queen’s exchequer — God save her Majesty! She is my good lord’s good mistress.”

“ Well, kinsman,” said mine host, “ it is my business to sell wine to those who can buy it. So, Jack Tapster, do me thine office. But I would I knew how to come by money as lightly as thou dost, Mike.”

“ Why, uncle,” said Lambourne, “ I will tell thee a secret. Dost see this little old fellow here? He can coin ducats faster than I can vent oaths.”

“ I will have none of his coinage in my purse though, Michael,” said mine host; “ I know what belongs to falsifying the Queen’s coin.”

“ Are you mad? ” whispered the astrologer to Michael. “ Is the devil in you? Can you not let us begone without drawing all men’s eyes on us? ”

“ Sayst thou? ” said Lambourne. “ By Heavens, masters, an any one dare to look on this old gentleman, I will slash the eyes out of his head with my poniard! So sit down, old friend, and be merry; these are mine ancient inmates, and will betray no man.”

The old man, seeing his guide in this uncontrollable humor, ceased to remonstrate with him, and sitting down in the most obscure corner of the room, called for a small measure of sack, over which he seemed, as it were, to slumber, withdrawing himself as much as possible from general observation, and doing nothing which could recall his existence to the recollection of his fellow-traveler, who by this time had got into close intimacy with his ancient comrade, Goldthred of Abingdon.

“ Here is to thee, Mike, with all my heart,” said the mercer; “ and thou canst tell one the reality of the new fashions too — but where be that rascal peddler? — there was a peddler here but now, methinks. Mine host, where the foul fiend is that peddler? ”

"Where wise men should be, Master Goldthred," replied Giles Gosling; "even shut up in his private chamber, telling over the sales of to-day, and preparing for the custom of to-morrow."

"Let him pass," said the mercer. "And now tell me, Mike — my honest Mike, how wears the hollands you won of me?"

"Why, well, as you may see, Master Goldthred," answered Mike.

"Thou wilt win no more hollands, I think, on such wager, friend Mike," said the mercer; "for the sulky swain, Tony Foster, rails at thee, and swears you shall ne'er darken his doors again."

"Doth he say so, the mincing, hypocritical miser?" vociferated Lambourne. "Why, then, he shall come down and receive my commands here, this blessed night, under my uncle's roof!"

"Tony Foster obey thy whistle!" said the mercer. "Alas! good Mike, go sleep — go sleep."

"I tell thee," said Michael Lambourne, in high chafe, "I will make Tony Foster come down to this public-house before we have finished three rounds."

"I will stake five angels against thy five, if thou wilt," said the mercer, "that Tony Foster will not leave his own roof, or come to alehouse after prayer time, for thee or any man."

"Content," said Lambourne. "Here, uncle, hold stakes, and let one of your young bleed-barrels there — one of your infant tapsters, trip up to the Place, and give this letter to Master Foster, and say that I, Michael Lambourne, pray to speak with him at mine uncle's castle here, upon business of grave import."

Shortly after this messenger was despatched, he returned with the answer that Master Foster was coming presently.

"Won — won!" said Lambourne, darting on the stakes. "What said he, boy?"

"Why," said the boy, "he muttered, that if he came not,

your worship would bolt out what were better kept in; and so he took his old flat cap and threadbare blue cloak, and, as I said before, he will be here incontinent."

"There is truth in what he said," replied Lambourne, as if speaking to himself. "Bring me a flagon of cold water, to christen my sack withal."

While Lambourne, whom the approach of Foster seemed to have recalled to a sense of his own condition, was busied in preparing to receive him, Giles Gosling stole up to the apartment of the peddler, whom he found traversing the room in much agitation.

"You withdrew yourself suddenly from the company," said the landlord to the guest.

"It was time, when the devil became one among you," replied the peddler.

"It is not courteous in you to term my nephew by such a name," said Gosling, "nor is it kindly in me to reply to it; and yet, in some sort, Mike may be considered as a limb of Satan."

"Pooh, I talk not of the swaggering ruffian," replied the peddler; "it is of the other, who for aught I know — But when go they? or wherefore come they?"

"Marry, these are questions I cannot answer," replied the host. "But look you, sir, you have brought me a token from worthy Master Tressilian — a pretty stone it is." He took out the ring, and looked at it, adding, as he put it into his purse again, that it was too rich a guerdon for anything he could do for the worthy donor. He was, he said, in the public line, and it ill became him to be too inquisitive into other folks' concerns; he had already said that he could hear nothing but that the lady lived still at Cumnor Place, in the closest seclusion, and, to such as by chance had a view of her, seemed pensive, and discontented with her solitude. "But here," he said, "if you are desirous to gratify your master, is the rarest chance that hath occurred for this many a day. Tony Foster is coming down

hither, and it is but letting Mike Lambourne smell another wine-flask, and the Queen's command would not move him from the ale-bench. So they are fast for an hour or so. Now, if you will don your pack, which will be your best excuse, you may, perchance, win the ear of the old servant, being assured of the master's absence, to let you try to get some custom of the lady, and then you may learn more of her condition than I or any other can tell you."

"True — very true," answered Wayland, for he it was; "an excellent device, but tell me one thing. Goes yonder old man up to Cumnor?"

"Surely, I think so," said the landlord; "their servant said he was to take their baggage thither."

"It is enough," said Wayland, assuming an air of resolution — "I will thwart that old villain's projects; my affright at his baleful aspect begins to abate, and my hatred to arise. Help me on with my pack, good mine host."

So saying, he assumed his burden, and guided by the landlord through the postern gate of the Black Bear, took the most private way from thence up to Cumnor Place.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN his anxiety to obey the earl's repeated charges of secrecy, Anthony Foster studied to elude notice by diminishing his attendants; so that one old male domestic and two aged crones, who assisted in keeping the countess's apartments in order, were the only servants of the family.

It was one of these old women who opened the door when Wayland knocked, and answered his petition to be admitted to exhibit his wares to the ladies of the family with a volley of vituperation. The peddler found the means of checking this vocif-

eration by slipping a silver groat into her hand, and intimating the present of some stuff for a coif, if the lady would buy of his wares.

"God ield thee, for mine is aw in littocks. Slocket with thy pack into gharn, mon. Her walks in gharn." Into the garden she ushered the peddler accordingly, and pointing to an old ruinous garden house, said, "Yonder be's her, mon — yonder be's her."

"She has left me to come off as I may," thought Wayland, as he heard the hag shut the garden door behind him. "They dare not murder me for so little trespass, and by this fair twilight. Hang it, I will on — a brave general never thought of his retreat till he was defeated. I see two females in the old garden house yonder; but how to address them? Stay — Will Shakespeare, be my friend in need!" He then sung, with a good voice and becoming audacity, the popular playhouse ditty —

"Lawn as white as driven snow,
Cyprus black as e'er was crow,
Gloves as sweet as damask roses,
Masks for faces and for noses."

"What hath fortune sent us here for an unwonted sight, Janet?" said the lady.

"One of those merchants of vanity, called peddlers," answered Janet, demurely, "who utters his light wares in lighter measures. I marvel old Dorcas let him pass."

"It is a lucky chance, girl," said the countess; "we lead a heavy life here, and this may while off a weary hour."

"Ay, my gracious lady," said Janet; "but my father?"

"He is not *my* father, Janet, nor, I hope, my master," answered the lady. "I say, call the man hither; I want some things."

"Nay," replied Janet, "your ladyship has but to say so in the next packet, and if England can furnish them they will be

sent. There will come mischief on't. Pray, dearest lady, let me bid the man begone! "

" I will have thee bid him come hither," said the countess; " or stay, thou terrified fool, I will bid him myself, and spare thee a chiding. "

" Ah! well-a-day, dearest lady, if that were the worst," said Janet, sadly, while the lady called to the peddler, " Good fellow, step forward — undo thy pack; if thou hast good wares, chance has sent thee hither for my convenience and thy profit. "

" What may your ladyship please to lack? " said Wayland, unstrapping his pack, and displaying its contents with as much dexterity as if he had been bred to the trade.

" What do I please to lack? " said the lady; " why, considering I have not for six long months bought one yard of lawn or cambric, or one trinket, the most inconsiderable, for my own use, and at my own choice, the better question is, what hast thou got to sell? Lay aside for me that cambric partlet and pair of sleeves; and those roundells of gold fringe, drawn out with cyprus; and that short cloak of cherry-colored fine cloth, garnished with gold buttons and loops. Is it not of an absolute fancy, Janet? "

" Nay, my lady," replied Janet, " if you consult my poor judgment, it is, methinks, over gaudy for a graceful habit. "

" Now, out upon thy judgment," said the countess; " thou shalt wear it thyself for penance sake; and I promise thee the gold buttons, being somewhat massive, will comfort thy father, and reconcile him to the cherry-colored body. See that he snap them not away, Janet. "

" May I pray your ladyship to spare my poor father! " said Janet.

" Nay, but why should any one spare him that is so sparing of his own nature? " replied the lady. " Well, but to our gear. That head garniture for myself, and that silver bodkin, mounted

with pearl; and take off two gowns of that russet cloth for Dorcas and Alison, Janet, to keep the old wretches warm against winter comes. And stay, hast thou no perfumes and sweet bags, or any handsome casting bottles of the newest mode?"

"Were I a peddler in earnest, I were a made merchant," thought Wayland, as he busied himself to answer the demands which she thronged one on another, with the eagerness of a young lady who has been long secluded from such a pleasing occupation. "But how to bring her to a moment's serious reflection?" Then, as he exhibited his choicest collection of essences and perfumes, he at once arrested her attention by observing, that these articles had almost risen to double value, since the magnificent preparations made by the Earl of Leicester to entertain the Queen and court at his princely Castle of Kenilworth.

"Ha!" said the countess, hastily; "that rumor then is true, Janet."

"Surely, madam," answered Wayland; "and I marvel it hath not reached your noble ladyship's ears. The Queen of England feasts with the noble earl for a week during the summer's progress; and there are many who will tell you England will have a king, and England's Elizabeth — God save her! — a husband, ere the progress be over."

"They lie like villains!" said the countess, bursting forth impatiently.

"For God's sake, madam, consider," said Janet, trembling with apprehension; "who would cumber themselves about peddler's tidings?"

"Yes, Janet!" exclaimed the countess; "right, thou hast corrected me justly. Such reports, blighting the reputation of England's brightest and noblest peer, can only find currency amongst the mean, the abject, and the infamous!"

"May I perish, lady," said Wayland Smith, observing that her violence directed itself towards him, "if I have done anything

to merit this strange passion! I have said but what many men say."

By this time the countess had recovered her composure, and endeavored, alarmed by the anxious hints of Janet, to suppress all appearance of displeasure. "I were loth," she said, "good fellow, that our Queen should change the virgin style, so dear to us her people — think not of it." And then, as if desirous to change the subject, she added, "And what is this paste, so carefully put up in the silver box?" as she examined the contents of a casket in which drugs and perfumes were contained in separate drawers.

"It is a remedy, madam, for a disorder of which I trust your ladyship will never have reason to complain. The amount of a small Turkey bean, swallowed daily for a week, fortifies the heart against those black vapors which arise from solitude, melancholy, unrequited affection, disappointed hope ——"

"Are you a fool, friend?" said the countess, sharply; "or do you think, because I have good-naturedly purchased your trumpery goods at your roguish prices, that you may put any gullery you will on me? Who ever heard that affections of the heart were cured by medicines given to the body?"

"Under your honorable favor," said Wayland, "I am an honest man, and I have sold my goods at an honest price. As to this most precious medicine, when I told its qualities, I asked you not to purchase it, so why should I lie to you? I have relieved many with it, both in court and city, and of late one Master Edmund Tressilian, a worshipful gentleman in Cornwall, who, on some slight, received, it was told me, where he had set his affections, was brought into that state of melancholy which made his friends alarmed for his life."

He paused, and the lady remained silent for some time, and then asked, with a voice which she strove in vain to render firm and indifferent in its tone, "Is the gentleman you have mentioned perfectly recovered?"

“ Passably, madam,” answered Wayland; “ he hath at least no bodily complaint.”

“ I will take some of the medicine, Janet,” said the countess. “ I too have sometimes that dark melancholy which overclouds the brain.”

“ You shall not do so, madam,” said Janet; “ who shall answer that this fellow vends what is wholesome ? ”

“ I will myself warrant my good faith,” said Wayland; and, taking a part of the medicine, he swallowed it before them. The countess now bought what remained, a step to which Janet, by farther objections, only determined her the more obstinately. She even took the first dose upon the instant, and professed to feel her heart lightened and her spirits augmented. The lady then piled the purchases she had made together, flung her purse to Janet, and desired her to compute the amount and to pay the peddler; while she herself, as if tired of the amusement she at first found in conversing with him, wished him good evening, and walked carelessly into the house, thus depriving Wayland of every opportunity to speak with her in private. He hastened, however, to attempt an explanation with Janet.

“ Maiden,” he said, “ thou hast the face of one who should love her mistress. She hath much need of faithful service.”

“ And well deserves it at my hands,” replied Janet; “ but what of that ? ”

“ Maiden, I am not altogether what I seem,” said the peddler, lowering his voice.

“ The less like to be an honest man,” said Janet.

“ The more so,” answered Wayland, “ since I am no peddler.”

“ Get thee gone then instantly, or I will call for assistance,” said Janet; “ my father must ere this be returned.”

“ Do not be so rash,” said Wayland; “ you will do what you may repent of. I am one of your mistress’s friends; and she had need of more, not that thou shouldst ruin those she hath.”

"How shall I know that?" said Janet.

"Look me in the face," said Wayland Smith, "and see if thou dost not read honesty in my looks."

And in truth there was in his physiognomy the sharp, keen expression of inventive genius and prompt intellect which, joined to quick and brilliant eyes, a well-formed mouth, and an intelligent smile, often gives grace and interest to features which are both homely and irregular. Janet looked at him with the sly simplicity of her sect, and replied, "Notwithstanding thy boasted honesty, friend, I think I see in thy countenance something of the peddler — something of the picaroon."

"On a small scale, perhaps," said Wayland Smith, laughing. "But this evening, or to-morrow, will an old man come hither with thy father, who has the stealthy step of the cat, the shrewd and vindictive eye of the rat, the fawning wile of the spaniel, the determined snatch of the mastiff; of him beware, for your own sake and that of your mistress. What precise mischief he meditates towards you I cannot guess; but death and disease have ever dogged his footsteps. Say nought of this to thy mistress; my art suggests to me that in her state the fear of evil may be as dangerous as its operation. But see that she take my specific, for (he lowered his voice, and spoke low but impressively in her ear) it is an antidote against poison. Hark, they enter the garden!"

In effect, a sound of noisy mirth and loud talking approached the garden door, alarmed by which, Wayland Smith sprang into the midst of a thicket of overgrown shrubs, while Janet withdrew to the garden house that she might not incur observation, and that she might at the same time conceal, at least for the present, the purchases made from the supposed peddler.

Janet, however, had no occasion for anxiety. Her father, his old attendant, Lord Leicester's domestic, and the astrologer entered the garden in tumult and in extreme perplexity, endeavoring to quiet Lambourne, whose brain had now become

completely fired with liquor, and who was one of those unfortunate persons who, being once stirred with the vinous stimulus, do not fall asleep like other drunkards, but are elevated into a state of uncontrollable frenzy. Like many men in this state also, Lambourne neither lost the power of motion, speech, or expression; but, on the contrary, spoke with unwonted emphasis and readiness, and told all that at another time he would have been most desirous to keep secret.

"What!" ejaculated Michael, at the full extent of his voice, "am I to have no welcome — no carouse, when I have brought fortune to your old ruinous dog-house in the shape of a devil's ally, that can change slate-shivers into Spanish dollars? Here, you Tony Fire-the-Fagot, Papist, Puritan, hypocrite, miser, profligate, devil, compounded of all men's sins, bow down and reverence him who has brought into thy house the very mammon thou worshippest!"

"For God's sake," said Foster, "speak low; come into the house; thou shalt have wine, or whatever thou wilt."

"No, I will have it here," thundered the inebriated ruffian. "No — no," he added hastily, "I will not drink with that poisoning devil within doors, to be choked with the fumes of arsenic and quicksilver; I learned from villain Varney to beware of that."

"Fetch him wine, in the name of all the fiends!" said the alchemist.

"Aha! and thou wouldst spice it for me, old Truepenny, wouldst thou not? Ay, I should have copperas, and hellebore, and vitriol, and aquafortis bubbling in my brain-pan. Hand me the flask thyself, old Tony Fire-the-Fagot. Or stay, let Leicester be king if he will — good — and Varney, villain Varney, grand vizier — why, excellent! And what shall I be, then? Why, emperor — Emperor Lambourne! I will see this choice piece of beauty that they have walled up here for their private pleasures; I will have her this very night to serve my wine-cup and put on

my nightcap. What should a fellow do with two wives were he twenty times an earl? Answer me that, Tony boy."

"I will stick my knife to the haft in him," said Foster, in a low tone, which trembled with passion.

"For the love of Heaven, no violence!" said the astrologer. "It cannot but be looked closely into. Here, honest Lambourne, wilt thou pledge me to the health of the noble earl of Leicester and Master Richard Varney?"

"I will, mine old Albumazar—I will, my trusty vender of ratsbane. Here goes it,—to Varney and Leicester! Two more noble, malicious, ambitious miscreants—well, I say no more. And so, my masters——"

Thus speaking, Lambourne exhausted the cup which the astrologer had handed to him, and which contained not wine, but distilled spirits. He swore half an oath, dropped the empty cup from his grasp, laid his hand on his sword without being able to draw it, reeled, and fell without sense or motion into the arms of the domestic, who dragged him off to his chamber and put him to bed.

In the general confusion, Janet regained her lady's chamber unobserved, trembling like an aspen leaf, but determined to keep secret from the countess the dreadful surmises which she could not help entertaining from the drunken ravings of Lambourne. Her fears, however, though they assumed no certain shape, kept pace with the advice of the peddler; and she confirmed her mistress in her purpose of taking the medicine which he had recommended.

Neither had these intimations escaped the ears of Wayland, who knew much better how to interpret them. He felt much compassion at beholding so lovely a creature as the countess, and whom he had first seen in the bosom of domestic happiness, exposed to the machinations of such a gang of villains. His indignation, too, had been highly excited by hearing the voice of his old master, against whom he felt, in equal degree, the

passions of hatred and fear. He nourished also a pride in his own art and resources; and, dangerous as the task was, he that night formed a determination to attain the bottom of the mystery, and to aid the distressed lady, if it were yet possible. From some words which Lambourne had dropped among his ravings, Wayland now, for the first time, felt inclined to doubt that Varney had acted entirely on his own account in wooing and winning the affections of this beautiful creature. Fame asserted of this zealous retainer that he had accommodated his lord in former love intrigues; and it occurred to Wayland Smith that Leicester himself might be the party chiefly interested. Her marriage with the earl he could not suspect; but even the discovery of such a passing intrigue with a lady of Mistress Amy Robsart's rank was a secret of the deepest importance to the stability of the favorite's power over Elizabeth. "If Leicester himself should hesitate to stifle such a rumor by very strange means," said he to himself, "he has those about him who would do him that favor without waiting for his consent. If I would meddle in this business, it must be in such a guise as my old master uses when he compounds his manna of Satan, and that is with a close mask on my face. So I will quit Giles Gosling to-morrow, and change my course and place of residence as often as a hunted fox. I should like to see this little Puritan, too, once more. She looks both pretty and intelligent."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE splendor of the approaching revels at Kenilworth was now the conversation through all England; and everything was collected at home or from abroad which could add to the gaiety or glory of the prepared reception of Elizabeth at the house of her most distinguished favorite. Meantime, Leicester appeared daily to advance in the Queen's favor. He was perpetually by her

side in council, willingly listened to in the moments of courtly recreation, favored with approaches even to familiar intimacy, and looked up to by all who had aught to hope at court.

Amid such a tide of prosperity, this minion of fortune and of the Queen's favor was probably the most unhappy man in the realm which seemed at his devotion. The character of his mistress was intimately known to him; it was his minute and studied acquaintance with her humors, as well as her noble faculties, which, joined to his powerful mental qualities and his eminent external accomplishments, had raised him so high in her favor; and it was that very knowledge of her disposition which led him to apprehend at every turn some sudden and overwhelming disgrace.

In fact, Queen Elizabeth had a character strangely compounded of the strongest masculine sense with those foibles which are chiefly supposed proper to the female sex. Her subjects had the full benefit of her virtues, which far predominated over her weaknesses; but her courtiers and those about her person had often to sustain sudden and embarrassing turns of caprice and the sallies of a temper which was both jealous and despotic. She was the nursing-mother of her people, but she was also the true daughter of Henry VIII.

Leicester was fully sensible of the difficulties which surrounded him; and, as he looked anxiously round for the means of maintaining himself in his precarious situation, and sometimes contemplated those of descending from it in safety, he saw but little hope of either. At such moments, his thoughts turned to dwell upon his secret marriage and its consequences; and it was in bitterness against himself, if not against his unfortunate countess, that he ascribed to that hasty measure, adopted in the ardor of what he now called inconsiderate passion, at once the impossibility of placing his power on a solid basis and the immediate prospect of its precipitate downfall. He would then call for Varney, whose advice was now more frequently resorted to than

ever. And their consultation usually terminated in anxious deliberation how, or in what manner, the countess was to be produced at Kenilworth.

"Elizabeth will not be satisfied without her presence," said the earl; "whether any suspicion hath entered her mind, as my own apprehensions suggest, or whether the petition of Tressilian is kept in her memory by Sussex or some other secret enemy, I know not; but amongst all the favorable expressions which she uses to me, she often recurs to the story of Amy Robsart. I have thrown every such impediment in the way of these accursed revels as I could propound even with a shade of decency, but to-day's interview has put all to a hazard. She said to me kindly but peremptorily, 'We will give you no farther time for preparations, my lord, lest you should altogether ruin yourself. On Saturday, the 9th of July, we will be with you at Kenilworth. We pray you to forget none of our appointed guests and suitors, and in especial this light o' love, Amy Robsart.'"

"Can my lady be by no means persuaded to bear for a brief space the obscure character which circumstances impose on her?" said Varney, after some hesitation.

"How, sirrah! my countess term herself *thy* wife! that may neither stand with my honor nor with hers."

"Alas! my lord," answered Varney, "and yet such is the quality in which Elizabeth now holds her; and to contradict this opinion is to discover all."

"Think of something else, Varney," said the earl, in great agitation; "this invention is naught. If I could give way to it, she would not; for I tell thee, Varney, if thou know'st it not, that not Elizabeth on the throne has more pride than the daughter of this obscure gentleman of Devon. She is flexible in many things, but where she holds her honor brought in question she hath a spirit and temper as apprehensive as lightning, and as swift in execution. All that it was in my power to bestow upon her was not merely deserved, but a thousand times over."

paid, by her own virtue and beauty; for never did greatness descend upon a creature so formed by nature to grace and adorn it."

"It is well, my lord, you are so satisfied," answered Varney, with his usual sardonic smile; "you will have time enough to enjoy undisturbed the society of one so gracious and beautiful—that is, so soon as such confinement in the Tower be over as may correspond to the crime of deceiving the affections of Elizabeth Tudor. A cheaper penalty, I presume, you do not expect?"

"Malicious fiend!" answered Leicester, "do you mock me in my misfortune? Manage it as thou wilt."

"If you are serious, my lord," said Varney, "you must set forth instantly and post for Cumnor Place."

"Do thou go thyself, Varney; the devil has given thee that sort of eloquence which is most powerful in the worst cause. I should stand self-convicted of villainy were I to urge such a deceit. Begone, I tell thee. Must I entreat thee to mine own dishonor!"

"No, my lord," said Varney; "but, if you are serious in entrusting me with the task of urging this most necessary measure, you must give me a letter to my lady as my credentials, and trust to me for backing the advice it contains with all the force in my power."

Leicester seized on writing materials, and twice or thrice commenced a letter to the countess, which he afterwards tore into fragments. At length he finished a few distracted lines, in which he conjured her, for reasons nearly concerning his life and honor, to consent to bear the name of Varney for a few days, during the revels at Kenilworth. He added, that Varney would communicate all the reasons which rendered this deception indispensable; and having signed and sealed these credentials, he flung them over the table to Varney, with a motion that he should depart, which his adviser was not slow to comprehend and obey.

Leicester remained like one stupefied, till he heard the tramp-

ling of the horses, as Varney threw himself into the saddle, and, followed by a single servant, set off for Berkshire. At the sound, the earl started from his seat and ran to the window, with the momentary purpose of recalling the unworthy commission with which he had entrusted one of whom he used to say, he knew no virtuous property save affection to his patron. But Varney was already beyond call.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE frequent visits of Leicester at Cumnor during the earlier part of their union had reconciled the countess to the solitude and privacy to which she was condemned; but when these visits became rarer and more rare, and when the void was filled up with letters of excuse, not always very warmly expressed, and generally extremely brief, discontent and suspicion began to haunt those splendid apartments which love had fitted up for beauty. Her answers to Leicester conveyed these feelings too bluntly, and pressed more naturally than prudently that she might be relieved from this obscure and secluded residence by the earl's acknowledgment of their marriage; and in arranging her arguments, with all the skill she was mistress of, she trusted chiefly to the warmth of the entreaties with which she urged them. Sometimes she even ventured to mingle reproaches, of which Leicester conceived he had good reason to complain.

"What signifies," said the Countess Amy, "that I have rank and honor in reality, if I am to live an obscure prisoner, and suffering in my character as one of dubious or disgraced reputation? I care not for all those strings of pearl which you fret me by warping into my tresses, Janet. I tell you that, at Lidcote Hall, if I put but a fresh rosebud among my hair, my good father would call me to him that he might see it more closely; and now I sit here, an image with gold and gems, and no one

to see my finery but you, Janet. There was the poor Tressilian, too; but it avails not speaking of him."

"It doth not indeed, madam," said her prudent attendant; "and verily you make me sometimes wish you would not speak of him so often or so rashly."

"It signifies nothing to warn me, Janet," said the impatient countess; "I was born free, though I am now mewed up like some fine foreign slave, rather than the wife of an English noble. I bore it all with pleasure while I was sure he loved me. I tell thee, Janet, I love my husband — I will love him till my latest breath — I cannot cease to love him, even if I would, or if he — which, God knows, may chance — should cease to love me. But I will say, and loudly, I would have been happier than I now am to have remained in Lidcote Hall; even although I must have married poor Tressilian, with his melancholy look, and his head full of learning, which I cared not for."

The rapid clatter of horses' feet, heard in the courtyard at this moment interrupted her and called her to the window. "It is Leicester!" she exclaimed, joyfully; "it is my noble earl! — it is my Dudley! Every stroke of his horse's hoof sounds like a note of lordly music!"

There was a brief bustle in the mansion, and Foster, with his downward look and sullen manner, entered the apartment to say, "That Master Richard Varney was arrived from my lord, having ridden all night, and craved to speak with her ladyship instantly."

"Varney!" said the disappointed countess; "and to speak with me! — pshaw! But he comes with news from Leicester, so admit him instantly."

Varney entered her dressing apartment, where she sat arrayed in her native loveliness, adorned with all that Janet's art, and a rich and tasteful undress, could bestow. His brow bore an anxious and hurried expression, as one who has that to say of which he doubts the reception, and who hath yet posted on from

the necessity of communicating his tidings. The countess's anxious eye at once caught the alarm as she exclaimed, "You bring news from my lord, Master Varney? Gracious Heaven! is he ill?"

"No, madam, thank Heaven!" said Varney. "Compose yourself, and permit me to take breath ere I communicate my tidings."

"No breath, sir," replied the lady, impatiently; "I know your theatrical arts. Since your breath hath sufficed to bring you hither, it may suffice to tell your tale, at least briefly, and in the gross."

"Madam," answered Varney, "we are not alone, and my lord's message was for your ear only."

"Leave us, Janet, and Master Foster," said the lady; "but remain in the next apartment, and within call."

Foster and his daughter retired, agreeably to the Lady Leicester's commands, into the next apartment, which was the withdrawing-room. The door which led from the sleeping-chamber was then carefully shut and bolted, and the father and daughter remained both in a posture of anxious attention, the first with a stern, suspicious, lowering cast of countenance, and Janet with folded hands, and looks which seemed divided betwixt her desire to know the fortunes of her mistress and her prayers to Heaven for her safety. Anthony Foster seemed himself to have some idea of what was passing through his daughter's mind, for he crossed the apartment and took her anxiously by the hand, saying, "That is right; pray, Janet — pray; we have all need of prayers, and some of us more than others. Pray, Janet. God forgive our sins; but Varney's sudden and strange arrival bodes us no good."

Janet turned her eyes fearfully towards the door, almost as if she expected some sounds of horror to be heard, or some sight of fear to display itself. All, however, was as still as death, and the voices of those who spoke in the inner chamber were, if they

spoke at all, carefully subdued to a tone which could not be heard in the next. At once, however, they were heard to speak fast, thick, and hastily; and presently after the voice of the countess was heard exclaiming, at the highest pitch to which indignation could raise it, "Undo the door, sir, I command you! Undo the door! I will have no other reply!" she continued, drowning with her vehement accents the low and muttered sounds which Varney was heard to utter betwixt whiles. "What ho! without there!" she persisted, accompanying her words with shrieks, "Janet, alarm the house. Foster, break open the door. I am detained here by a traitor. Use axe and lever, Master Foster — I will be your warrant."

"It shall not need, madam," Varney was at length distinctly heard to say. "If you please to expose my lord's important concerns and your own to the general ear, I will not be your hindrance."

The door was unlocked and thrown open, and Janet and her father rushed in, anxious to learn the cause of these reiterated exclamations.

When they entered the apartment, Varney stood by the door grinding his teeth, with an expression in which rage, and shame, and fear, had each their share. The countess stood in the midst of her apartment. The veins in her beautiful forehead started into swollen blue lines through the hurried impulse of her articulation, her cheek and neck glowed like scarlet, her eyes were like those of an imprisoned eagle, flashing red lightning on the foes whom it cannot reach with its talons. The gesture and attitude corresponded with the voice and looks, and altogether presented a spectacle which was at once beautiful and fearful; so much of the sublime had the energy of passion united with the Countess Amy's natural loveliness. Janet, as soon as the door was open, ran to her mistress; and more slowly, yet with more haste than he was wont, Anthony Foster went to Richard Varney.

"In the Truth's name, what ails your ladyship?" said the former.

"What, in the name of Satan, have you done to her?" said Foster to his friend.

"Who, I? — nothing," answered Varney, but with sunken head and sullen voice — "nothing but communicated to her her lord's commands, which, if the lady list not to obey, she knows better how to answer it than I may pretend to do."

"Now, by Heaven, Janet," said the countess, "the false traitor lies in his throat! He must needs lie, for he speaks to the dishonor of my noble lord; he must needs lie doubly, for he speaks to gain ends of his own, equally execrable and unattainable."

"You have misapprehended me, lady," said Varney, with a sulky species of submission and apology; "let this matter rest till your passion be abated, and I will explain all."

"Thou shalt never have an opportunity to do so," said the countess. "Look at him, Janet. He is fairly dressed, hath the outside of a gentleman, and hither he came to persuade me it was my lord's pleasure — nay, more, my wedded lord's commands — that I should go with him to Kenilworth, and before the Queen and nobles, and in presence of my own wedded lord, that I should acknowledge him — *him* there, that very cloak-brushing, shoe-cleaning fellow — *him* there, my lord's lackey, for my liege lord and husband; furnishing against myself, great God! whenever I was to vindicate my right and my rank, such weapons as would hew my just claim from the root, and destroy my character to be regarded as an honorable matron of the English nobility!"

"You hear her, Foster, and you, young maiden, hear this lady," answered Varney, taking advantage of the pause which the countess had made in her charge, more for lack of breath than for lack of matter — "you hear that her heat only objects to me the course which our good lord, for the purpose to keep

certain matters secret, suggests in the very letter which she holds in her hands."

Foster here attempted to interfere with a face of authority, which he thought became the charge intrusted to him. "Nay, lady, I must needs say you are over hasty in this. Such deceit is not utterly to be condemned when practiced for a righteous end."

"Now, so Heaven pardon me my useless anger," answered the countess, "thou art as daring a hypocrite as yonder fellow is an impudent deceiver! Never will I believe that the noble Dudley gave countenance to so dastardly, so dishonorable a plan. Thus I tread on his infamy, if indeed it be, and thus destroy its remembrance forever!"

So saying, she tore in pieces Leicester's letter, and stamped, in the extremity of impatience, as if she would have annihilated the minute fragments into which she had rent it.

"Bear witness," said Varney, collecting himself, "she hath torn my lord's letter, in order to burden me with the scheme of his devising; and although it promises nought but danger and trouble to me, she would lay it to my charge, as if I had any purpose of mine own in it."

"Thou liest, thou treacherous slave!" said the countess, in spite of Janet's attempts to keep her silent, in the sad foresight that her vehemence might only furnish arms against herself. "Thou liest!" she continued. "Let me go, Janet. Were it the last word I have to speak, he lies; he had his own foul ends to seek; and broader he would have displayed them, had my passion permitted me to preserve the silence which at first encouraged him to unfold his vile projects."

"Madam," said Varney, overwhelmed in spite of his effrontery, "I entreat you to believe yourself mistaken."

"As soon will I believe light darkness," said the enraged countess. "I would I were a man but for five minutes! But go — begone! Tell thy master that, when I take the foul course

to which such scandalous deceits as thou hast recommended on his behalf must necessarily lead me, I will give him a rival something worthy of the name. Go — begone, sir; I scorn thee so much that I am ashamed to have been angry with thee."

Varney left the room with a mute expression of rage, and was followed by Foster, whose apprehension, naturally slow, was overpowered by the eager and abundant discharge of indignation which, for the first time, he had heard burst from the lips of a being who had seemed till that moment too languid and too gentle to nurse an angry thought or utter an intemperate expression. Foster, therefore, pursued Varney from place to place, persecuting him with interrogatories, to which the other replied not until they were in the opposite side of the quadrangle, and in the old library, with which the reader has already been made acquainted. Here he turned round on his persevering follower, and thus addressed him, in a tone tolerably equal; that brief walk having been sufficient to give one so habituated to command his temper time to rally and recover his presence of mind.

"Tony," he said, with his usual sneering laugh, "it avails not to deny it. Yon termagant looked so tempting, and had the art to preserve her countenance so naturally, while I communicated my lord's message, that, by my faith, I thought I might say some little thing for myself. She thinks she hath my head under her girdle now, but she is deceived. Where is Doctor Alasco?"

"In his laboratory," answered Foster; "it is the hour he is not spoken withal; we must wait till noon is past, or spoil his important — What said I, important? I would say, interrupt his divine studies."

"Ay, he studies the devil's divinity," said Varney; "but when I want him one hour must suffice as well as another. Lead the way to his pandemonium."

So spoke Varney, and with hasty and perturbed steps followed Foster, who conducted him through private passages, many of

which were well-nigh ruinous, to the opposite side of the quadrangle, where, in a subterranean apartment, now occupied by the chemist Alasco, one of the abbots of Abingdon, who had a turn for the occult sciences, had, much to the scandal of his convent, established a laboratory.

Anthony Foster paused before the door, which was scrupulously secured within, and again showed a marked hesitation to disturb the sage in his operations. But Varney, less scrupulous, roused him, by knocking and voice, until at length, slowly and reluctantly, the inmate of the apartment undid the door. The chemist appeared, muttering, with spiteful impatience, "Am I forever to be recalled to the affairs of earth from those of heaven?"

"To the affairs of hell," answered Varney, "for that is thy proper element. Foster, we need thee at our conference."

Foster slowly entered the room. Varney, following, barred the door, and they betook themselves to secret council.

In the meanwhile, the countess traversed the apartment, with shame and anger contending on her lovely cheek.

"The villain," she said — "the cold-blooded, calculating slave! But I unmasked him; Janet — I made the snake uncoil all his folds before me, and crawl abroad in his naked deformity. I suspended my resentment, at the danger of suffocating under the effort, until he had let me see the very bottom of a heart more foul than hell's darkest corner. And thou, Leicester, is it possible thou couldst bid me for a moment deny my wedded right in thee, or thyself yield it to another! But it is impossible; the villain has lied in all. Janet, I will not remain here longer. I fear him — I fear thy father; I grieve to say it, Janet, but I fear thy father, and, worst of all, this odious Varney. I will escape from Cumnor."

"Alas! madam, whither would you fly, or by what means will you escape from these walls?"

"I know not, Janet," said the unfortunate young lady, look-

ing upwards and clasping her hands together — “ I know not where I shall fly, or by what means; but I am certain the God I have served will not abandon me in this dreadful crisis, for I am in the hands of wicked men.”

“ Do not think so, dear lady,” said Janet; “ my father is stern and strict in his temper, and severely true to his trust; but yet ——”

At this moment, Anthony Foster entered the apartment bearing in his hand a glass cup and a small flask. His manner was singular; for, while approaching the countess with the respect due to her rank, he showed nothing of that sullen consciousness of authority which he was wont to conceal under a clumsy affectation of civility and deference. And yet it seemed as if his smile was more in fear than courtesy, and as if, while he pressed the countess to taste of the choice cordial, which should refresh her spirits after her late alarm, he was conscious of meditating some farther injury. His hand trembled also, his voice faltered, and his whole outward behavior exhibited so much that was suspicious, that his daughter Janet raised her head, assumed an attitude and gait of determination and authority, and walking slowly betwixt her father and her mistress, took the salver from the hand of the former, and said in a low, but marked and decided tone, “ Father, *I* will fill for my noble mistress, when such is her pleasure.”

“ Thou, my child ? ” said Foster, eagerly and apprehensively; “ no, my child, it is not *thou* shalt render the lady this service.”

“ And why, I pray you,” said Janet, “ if it be fitting that the noble lady should partake of the cup at all ? ”

“ Why — why ? ” said her father, hesitating, and then bursting into passion as the readiest mode of supplying the lack of all other reason. “ Why, because it is my pleasure, minion, that you should not! Get you gone to the evening lecture.”

“ Now, as I hope to hear lecture again,” replied Janet, “ I will not go thither this night, unless I am better assured of my

mistress's safety. Give me that flask, father;" and she took it from his reluctant hand, while he resigned it as if conscience-struck. "And now," she said, "father, that which shall benefit my mistress cannot do *me* prejudice. Father, I drink to you."

Foster, without speaking a word, rushed on his daughter and wrested the flask from her hand; then, as if embarrassed by what he had done, and totally unable to resolve what he should do next, he stood with it in his hand, one foot advanced and the other drawn back, glaring on his daughter with a countenance in which rage, fear, and convicted villainy formed a hideous combination.

"This is strange, my father," said Janet, keeping her eye fixed on his, in the manner in which those who have the charge of lunatics are said to overawe their unhappy patients; "will you neither let me serve my lady nor drink to her myself?"

The courage of the countess sustained her through this dreadful scene, of which the import was not the less obvious that it was not even hinted at. She preserved even the rash carelessness of her temper, and though her cheek had grown pale at the first alarm, her eye was calm and almost scornful. "Will *you* taste this rare cordial, Master Foster? Perhaps you will not yourself refuse to pledge us, though you permit not Janet to do so. Drink, sir, I pray you."

"I will not," answered Foster.

"And for whom, then, is the precious beverage reserved, sir?" said the countess.

"For the devil who brewed it!" answered Foster; and, turning on his heel, he left the chamber.

Janet looked at her mistress with a countenance expressive in the highest degree of shame, dismay, and sorrow.

"Do not weep for me, Janet," said the countess, kindly.

"No, madam," replied her attendant, in a voice broken by sobs, "it is not for you I weep, it is for myself — it is for that unhappy man. Those who are dishonored before man, those who

are condemned by God, have cause to mourn, not those who are innocent! Farewell, madam!" she said, hastily assuming the mantle in which she was wont to go abroad.

"Do you leave me, Janet?" said her mistress — "desert me in such an evil strait?"

"Desert you, madam!" exclaimed Janet; and, running back to her mistress, she imprinted a thousand kisses on her hand — "desert you! may the Hope of my trust desert me when I do so! No, madam; well you said the God you serve will open you a path for deliverance. There is a way of escape; I have prayed night and day for light, that I might see how to act betwixt my duty to yonder unhappy man and that which I owe to you. Sternly and fearfully that light has now dawned, and I must not shut the door which God opens. Ask me no more. I will return in brief space."

So speaking, she wrapped herself in her mantle, and saying to the old woman whom she passed in the outer room that she was going to evening prayer, she left the house.

Meanwhile, her father had reached once more the laboratory, where he found the accomplices of his intended guilt.

"Has the sweet bird sipped?" said Varney, with half a smile; while the astrologer put the same question with his eyes, but spoke not a word.

"She has not, nor she shall not from my hands," replied Foster; "would you have me do murder in my daughter's presence?"

"Wert thou not told, thou sullen and yet faint-hearted slave," answered Varney, with bitterness, "that no *murder*, as thou call'st it, with that staring look and stammering tone, is designed in the matter? Wert thou not told that a brief illness, such as woman puts on in very wantonness, that she may wear her night-gear at noon, and lie on a settle when she should mind her domestic business, is all here aimed at?"

"I swear it," said Alasco, "that the elixir thou hast there in the flask will not prejudice life!"

"I know not, gentlemen," said Foster, "where your designs tend to; but in one thing I am bound up, that, fall back fall edge, I will have one in this place that may pray for me, and that one shall be my daughter. I have lived ill, and the world has been too weighty with me; but she is as innocent as ever she was when on her mother's lap, and she, at least, shall have her portion in that happy City whose walls are of pure gold, and the foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones."

"Ay, Tony," said Varney, "that were a paradise to thy heart's content. Debate the matter with him, Doctor Alasco; I will be with you anon."

So speaking, Varney arose, and, taking the flask from the table, he left the room. The astrologer immediately engaged Foster in a debate on the subject of alchemy, and so deeply interested did both become that the absence of Varney was apparently forgotten. It was not long, however, before that worthy returned bearing the empty goblet in his hand.

"Varney," cried Alasco — "Varney already returned! Hast thou ——" he stopped short.

"Have I done mine errand, thou wouldst say?" replied Varney. "I have. And thou," he added, showing more symptoms of interest than he had hitherto exhibited — "art thou sure thou hast poured forth neither more nor less than the just measure?"

"Ay," replied the alchemist, "as sure as men can be in these nice proportions."

"Nay, then," said Varney, "I fear nothing. I know thou wilt not go a step farther to the devil than thou art justly considered for. Thou wert paid to create illness, and wouldst esteem it thriftless prodigality to do murder at the same price. Come, let us each to our chamber. We shall see the event to-morrow."

"What didst thou do to make her swallow it?" said Foster, shuddering.

"Nothing," answered Varney, "but looked on her with that

aspect which governs madmen, women, and children. They told me, in St. Luke's Hospital, that I have the right look for overpowering a refractory patient."

"And art thou not afraid," said Foster, "lest the dose be disproportioned?"

"If so," replied Varney, "she will but sleep the sounder, and the fear of that shall not break my rest. Good night, my masters."

CHAPTER XX.

THE summer evening was closed, and Janet, just when her longer stay might have occasioned suspicion and inquiry in that jealous household, returned to Cumnor Place, and hastened to the apartment in which she had left her lady. She found her with her head resting on her arms, and these crossed upon a table which stood before her. As Janet came in, she neither looked up nor stirred.

Her faithful attendant ran to her mistress with the speed of lightning, and rousing her at the same time with her hand, conjured the countess, in the most earnest manner, to look up and say what thus affected her. The unhappy lady raised her head accordingly, and looking on her attendant with a ghastly eye, and cheek as pale as clay, "Janet," she said, "I have drank it."

"God be praised!" said Janet, hastily. "I mean, God be praised that it is no worse; the potion will not harm you. Rise, shake this lethargy from your limbs and this despair from your mind."

"Janet," repeated the countess again, "disturb me not — leave me at peace — let life pass quietly — I am poisoned."

"You are not, my dearest lady," answered the maiden, eagerly; "what you have swallowed cannot injure you, for the antidote has been taken before it, and I hastened hither to tell you that the means of escape are open to you."

"Escape!" exclaimed the lady, as she raised herself hastily in her chair, while light returned to her eye and life to her cheek; "but ah! Janet, it comes too late."

"Not so, dearest lady. Rise, take mine arm, walk through the apartment. Let not fancy do the work of poison! So; feel you not now that you are possessed of the full use of your limbs?"

"The torpor seems to diminish," said the countess, as, supported by Janet, she walked to and fro in the apartment; "but is it then so, and have I not swallowed a deadly draught? Varney was here since thou wert gone, and commanded me, with eyes in which I read my fate, to swallow the horrible drug. O Janet! it must be fatal; never was harmless draught served by such a cupbearer."

"He did not deem it harmless, I fear," replied the maiden; "but God confounds the devices of the wicked. Believe me, as I swear by the dear Gospel in which we trust, your life is safe from his practice. Did you not debate with him?"

"The house was silent," answered the lady, "thou gone, no other but he in the chamber, and he capable of every crime. I did but stipulate he would remove his hateful presence, and I drank whatever he offered. But you spoke of escape, Janet; can I be so happy?"

"Are you strong enough to bear the tidings and make the effort?" said the maiden.

"Strong!" answered the countess — "ask the hind, when the fangs of the deerhound are stretched to gripe her, if she is strong enough to spring over a chasm. I am equal to every effort that may relieve me from this place."

"Hear me, then," said Janet. "One, whom I deem an assured friend of yours, has shown himself to me in various disguises, and sought speech of me, which — for my mind was not clear on the matter until this evening — I have ever declined. He was the peddler who brought you goods, the itinerant hawker

who sold me books; whenever I stirred abroad I was sure to see him. The event of this night determined me to speak with him. He waits even now at the postern gate of the park with means for your flight. But have you strength of body? Have you courage of mind? Can you undertake the enterprise?"

"She that flies from death," said the lady, "finds strength of body. The thoughts of leaving behind me the villain who menaces both my life and honor would give me strength to rise from my deathbed."

"In God's name, then, lady," said Janet, "I must bid you adieu, and to God's charge I must commit you!"

"Will you not fly with me, then, Janet?" said the countess, anxiously. "Am I to lose thee? Is this thy faithful service?"

"Lady, I would fly with you as willingly as bird ever fled from cage, but my doing so would occasion instant discovery and pursuit. I must remain, and use means to disguise the truth for some time."

"And am I then to travel alone with this stranger?" said the lady. "Bethink thee, Janet, may not this prove some deeper and darker scheme to separate me perhaps from you, who are my only friend?"

"No, madam, do not suppose it," answered Janet, readily; "the youth is an honest youth in his purpose to you; and a friend to Master Tressilian, under whose direction he is come hither."

"If he be a friend of Tressilian," said the countess, "I will commit myself to his charge as to that of an angel sent from Heaven; for Tressilian forgot himself whenever he could be of use to others. Alas! and how was he requited!"

With eager haste they collected the few necessities which it was thought proper the countess should take with her, and which Janet, with speed and dexterity, formed into a small bundle, not forgetting to add such ornaments of intrinsic value as came most readily in her way, and particularly a casket of jewels, which she

wisely judged might prove of service in some future emergency. The Countess of Leicester next changed her dress for one which Janet usually wore upon any brief journey, for they judged it necessary to avoid every external distinction which might attract notice. Ere these preparations were fully made, the moon had arisen in the summer heaven, and all in the mansion had betaken themselves to rest, or at least to the silence and retirement of their chambers.

There was no difficulty anticipated in escaping, whether from the house or garden, provided only they could elude observation. Anthony Foster had accustomed himself to consider his daughter as a conscious sinner might regard a visible guardian angel, and therefore his trust in her knew no bounds. Janet commanded her own motions during the daytime, and had a master key which opened the postern door of the park, so that she could go to the village at pleasure, either upon the household affairs, or to attend her devotions at the meeting-house of her sect. It is true, the daughter of Foster was thus liberally entrusted under the solemn condition that she should not avail herself of these privileges to do anything inconsistent with the safe-keeping of the countess; for so her residence at Cumnor Place had been termed, since she began of late to exhibit impatience of the restrictions to which she was subjected. Nor is there reason to suppose that anything short of the dreadful suspicions which the scene of that evening had excited could have induced Janet to violate her word, or deceive her father's confidence.

The fugitive countess, with her guide, traversed with hasty steps the broken and interrupted path, which had once been an avenue, now totally darkened by the boughs of spreading trees which met above their head, and now receiving a doubtful and deceiving light from the beams of the moon, which penetrated where the ax had made openings in the wood. Their path was repeatedly interrupted by felled trees, or the large boughs which had been left on the ground till time served to make them into

fagots and billets. The inconvenience and difficulty attending these interruptions, the breathless haste of the first part of their route, the exhausting sensations of hope and fear, so much affected the countess's strength that Janet was forced to propose that they should pause for a few minutes to recover breath and spirits. Both, therefore, stood still beneath the shadow of a huge old gnarled oak-tree, and both naturally looked back to the mansion which they had left behind them, whose long dark front was seen in the gloomy distance, with its huge stacks of chimneys, turrets, and clock-house, rising above the line of the roof, and defined against the pure azure blue of the summer sky.

They performed the second part of their journey with more deliberation, and of course more easily, than the first hasty commencement. This gave them leisure for reflection; and Janet now, for the first time, ventured to ask her lady which way she proposed to direct her flight. Receiving no immediate answer, Janet ventured to add, "Probably to your father's house, where you are sure of safety and protection?"

"No, Janet," said the lady, mournfully, "I will not return thither till my lord's permission and public acknowledgment of our marriage restore me to my native home with all the rank and honor which he has bestowed on me."

"And whither will you, then, madam?" said Janet.

"To Kenilworth, girl," said the countess, boldly and freely. "I will see these revels — these princely revels — the preparation for which makes the land ring from side to side. Methinks, when the Queen of England feasts within my husband's halls, the Countess of Leicester should be no unbeseeming guest."

"I pray God you may be a welcome one!" said Janet, hastily.

"You abuse my situation, Janet," said the countess, angrily, "and you forget your own."

"I do neither, dearest madam," said the sorrowful maiden; "but have you forgotten that the noble earl has given such strict charges to keep your marriage secret that he may preserve his

court favor? and can you think that your sudden appearance at his castle at such a juncture, and in such a presence, will be acceptable to him?"

"Thou thinkest I would disgrace him?" said the countess; "I will see him, and receive from his own lips the directions for my future conduct. Do not argue against my resolution, Janet; you will only confirm me in it. And to own the truth, I am resolved to know my fate at once, and from my husband's own mouth, and to seek him at Kenilworth is the surest way to attain my purpose."

While Janet hastily revolved in her mind the difficulties and uncertainties attendant on the unfortunate lady's situation, she was inclined to alter her first opinion, and to think, upon the whole, that, since the countess had withdrawn herself from the retreat in which she had been placed by her husband, it was her first duty to repair to his presence, and possess him with the reasons of such conduct. She knew what importance the earl attached to the concealment of their marriage, and could not but own that, by taking any step to make it public without his permission, the countess would incur, in a high degree, the indignation of her husband. If she retired to her father's house, without an explicit avowal of her rank, her situation was likely greatly to prejudice her character; and if she made such an avowal, it might occasion an irreconcilable breach with her husband. At Kenilworth, again, she might plead her cause with her husband himself, whom Janet, though distrusting him more than the countess did, believed incapable of being accessory to the base and desperate means which his dependants, from whose power the lady was now escaping, might resort to, in order to stifle her complaints of the treatment she had received at their hands. But at the worst, and were the earl himself to deny her justice and protection, still at Kenilworth, if she chose to make her wrongs public, the countess might have Tressilian for her

advocate, and the Queen for her judge; for so much Janet had learned in her short conference with Wayland. She was, therefore, on the whole, reconciled to her lady's proposal of going towards Kenilworth, and so expressed herself; recommending, however, to the countess the utmost caution in making her arrival known to her husband.

"Hast thou thyself been cautious, Janet?" said the countess: "this guide, in whom I must put my confidence, hast thou not entrusted to him the secret of my condition?"

"From me he has learned nothing," said Janet; "nor do I think that he knows more than what the public in general believe of your situation."

"And what is that?" said the lady.

"That you left your father's house — but I shall offend you again if I go on," said Janet, interrupting herself.

"Nay, go on," said the countess; "I must learn to endure the evil report which my folly has brought upon me. They think, I suppose, that I have left my father's house to follow lawless pleasure. It is an error which will soon be removed — indeed it shall, for I will live with spotless fame or I shall cease to live. I am accounted, then, the unlawful companion of my Leicester?"

"Most men say of Varney," said Janet; "yet some call him only the convenient cloak of his master's pleasures; for reports of the profuse expense in garnishing yonder apartments have secretly gone abroad, and such doings far surpass the means of Varney. But this latter opinion is little prevalent; for men dare hardly even hint suspicion when so high a name is concerned, lest the Star Chamber should punish them for scandal of the nobility."

"They do well to speak low," said the countess, "who would mention the illustrious Dudley as the accomplice of such a wretch as Varney. We have reached the postern. Ah! Janet, I must bid thee farewell! Weep not, my good girl," said she, endeavor-

ing to cover her own reluctance to part with her faithful attendant. "Thou must be brave, Janet; for though thou art now but the attendant of a distressed and errant lady, who is both nameless and fameless, yet, when we meet again, thou must be dressed as becomes the gentlewoman nearest in love and in service to the first countess in England!"

"Now, may God grant it, dear lady!" said Janet — "not that I may go with gayer apparel, but that we may both wear our kirtles over lighter hearts."

By this time the lock of the postern door had, after some hard wrenching, yielded to the master key; and the countess, not without internal shuddering, saw herself beyond the walls which her husband's strict commands had assigned to her as the boundary of her walks. Waiting with much anxiety for their appearance, Wayland Smith stood at some distance, shrouding himself behind a hedge which bordered the highroad.

"Is all safe?" said Janet to him, anxiously, as he approached them with caution.

"All," he replied; "but I have been unable to procure a horse for the lady. She must ride on my palfrey, and I must walk by her side until I come by another horse. There will be no pursuit, if you, pretty Mistress Janet, forget not thy lesson."

"No more than the wise widow of Tekoa forgot the words which Joab put into her mouth," answered Janet. "To-morrow, I say that my lady is unable to rise."

"Ay, and that she hath aching and heaviness of the head, a throbbing at the heart, and lists not to be disturbed. Fear not; they will take the hint, and trouble thee with few questions; they understand the disease."

"But," said the lady, "my absence must be soon discovered, and they will murder her in revenge. I will rather return than expose her to such danger."

"Be at ease on my account, madam," said Janet; "I would you were as sure of receiving the favor you desire from those to

whom you must make appeal, as I am that my father, however angry, will suffer no harm to befall me."

The countess was now placed by Wayland upon his horse, around the saddle of which he had placed his cloak, so folded as to make her a commodious seat.

"Adieu, and may the blessing of God wend with you!" said Janet, again kissing her mistress's hand, who returned her benediction with a mute caress. They then tore themselves asunder, and Janet, addressing Wayland, exclaimed, "May Heaven deal with you at your need, as you are true or false to this most injured and most helpless lady!"

"Amen! dearest Janet," replied Wayland; "and believe me, I will so acquit myself of my trust, as may tempt even your pretty eyes, saintlike as they are, to look less scornfully on me when we next meet."

The latter part of this adieu was whispered into Janet's ear; and, although she made no reply to it directly, yet her manner did not discourage the hope which Wayland's words expressed. She re-entered the postern door, and locked it behind her, while Wayland taking the horse's bridle in his hand and walking close by its head, they began in silence their dubious and moonlight journey.

Although Wayland Smith used the utmost despatch which he could make, yet this mode of traveling was so slow that, when morning began to dawn through the eastern mist, he found himself no farther than about ten miles distant from Cumnor. "Now, a plague upon all smooth-spoken hosts!" said Wayland, unable longer to suppress his mortification and uneasiness. "Had the false loon, Giles Gosling, but told me plainly two days since that I was to reckon nought upon him, I had shifted better for myself."

The lady endeavored to comfort her guide, observing, that the dawn would enable him to make more speed.

"True, madam," he replied; "but then it will enable other

folk to take note of us, and that may prove an ill beginning of our journey. I had not cared a spark from anvil about the matter had we been farther advanced on our way."

The countess looked anxiously around her, and as the shadows withdrew from the landscape, and the heightening glow of the eastern sky promised the speedy rise of the sun, expected at every turn that the increasing light would expose them to the view of the vengeful pursuers, or present some dangerous and insurmountable obstacle to the prosecution of their journey. Wayland Smith perceived her uneasiness, and, displeased with himself for having given her cause of alarm, strode on with affected alacrity, now talking to the horse as one expert in the language of the stable, now whistling to himself low and interrupted snatches of tunes, and now assuring the lady there was no danger; while at the same time he looked sharply around to see that there was nothing in sight which might give the lie to his words while they were issuing from his mouth. Thus did they journey on, until an unexpected incident gave them the means of continuing their pilgrimage with more speed and convenience.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUR travelers were in the act of passing a small thicket of trees close by the roadside, when the first living being presented himself whom they had seen since their departure from Cumnor Place. This was a stupid lout, seemingly a farmer's boy, in a gray jerkin, with his head bare, his hose about his heels, and huge gaiters on his feet. He held by the bridle what of all things they most wanted — a palfrey, namely, with a sidesaddle and all other garniture for a woman's mounting; and he hailed Wayland Smith with, "Zur, ye be zure the party?"

"Ay, that I be, my lad," answered Wayland, without an instant's hesitation; and it must be owned that consciences

trained in a stricter school of morality might have given way to an occasion so tempting. While he spoke he caught the rein out of the boy's hand, and almost at the same time helped down the countess from his own horse, and aided her to mount on that which chance had thus presented for her acceptance.

The lad, however, who was thus hastily dispossessed of his charge, began to stare hard, and scratch his head, as if seized with some qualms of conscience for delivering up the animal on such brief explanation. "I be right zure thou be'st the party," said he, muttering to himself, "but thou shouldst ha zaid 'Beans,' thou know'st."

"Ay — ay," said Wayland, speaking at a venture; "and thou 'Bacon,' thou know'st."

"Noa — noa," said the lad; "bide ye — bide ye; it was 'Pease' a should ha said."

"Well — well," answered Wayland, "'Pease' be it, a God's name! though 'Bacon' were the better password."

And being by this time mounted on his own horse, he caught the rein of the palfrey from the uncertain hold of the hesitating young boor, flung him a small piece of money, and made amends for lost time by riding briskly off without farther parley. They had not ridden a short mile from the place where they left the lad before they heard a man's voice shouting on the wind behind them, "Robbery! — robbery! Stop thief!"

"I hâd better have gone barefoot all my life," Wayland said; "it is the hue and cry, and I am a lost man. Ah! Wayland — Wayland, many a time thy father said horseflesh would be the death of thee."

He turned his head repeatedly to see by whom he was chased, and was much comforted when he could only discover a single rider, who was, however, well mounted, and came after them at a speed which left them no chance of escaping, even had the lady's strength permitted her to ride as fast as her palfrey might have been able to gallop.

"There may be fair play betwixt us, sure," thought Wayland, "where there is but one man on each side; and yonder fellow sits on his horse more like a monkey than a cavalier. Pshaw! if it come to the worst, it will be easy unhorsing him. Nay, I think his horse will take the matter in his own hand, for he has the bridle betwixt his teeth. Oons, what care I for him?" said he, as the pursuer drew yet nearer; "it is but the little animal of a mercer from Abingdon, when all is over."

Even so it was, as the experienced eye of Wayland had descried at a distance. For the valiant mercer's horse, which was a beast of mettle, feeling himself put to his speed, and discerning a couple of horses riding fast, at some hundred yards' distance before him, betook himself to the road with such alacrity as totally deranged the seat of his rider, who not only came up with, but passed at full gallop, those whom he had been pursuing, pulling the reins with all his might, and ejaculating, "Stop! — stop!" an interjection which seemed rather to regard his own palfrey than what seamen call "the chase." With the same involuntary speed, he shot ahead, to use another nautical phrase, about a furlong ere he was able to stop and turn his horse, and then rode back towards our travelers, adjusting, as well as he could, his disordered dress, resettling himself in the saddle, and endeavoring to substitute a bold and martial frown for the confusion and dismay which sate upon his visage during his involuntary career.

Wayland had just time to caution the lady not to be alarmed, adding, "This fellow is a gull, and I will use him as such."

When the mercer had recovered breath and audacity enough to confront them, he ordered Wayland, in a menacing tone, to deliver up his palfrey.

"How?" said the smith, "are we commanded to stand and deliver on the king's highway?"

"Haro and help, and hue and cry, every true man!" said the mercer, "I am withstood in seeking to recover mine own!"

"Thou swear'st thy gods in vain, foul paynim," said Wayland, "for I will through with mine purpose, were death at the end on't. Nevertheless, know, thou false man of frail cambric, that I am he, even the peddler, whom thou didst boast to meet on Maiden Castle Moor and despoil of his pack; wherefore betake thee to thy weapons presently."

"I spoke but in jest, man," said Goldthred; "I am an honest shopkeeper and citizen, who scorns to leap forth on any man from behind a hedge."

"Then, by my faith, most puissant mercer," answered Wayland, "I am sorry for my vow, which was that, wherever I met thee, I would despoil thee of thy palfrey, unless thou couldst defend it by blows of force. All I can do for thee is to leave the horse at Donnington, in the nearest hostelry."

"But I tell thee, friend," said the mercer, "it is the very horse on which I was this day to carry Jane Thackham of Shottesbrook as far as the parish church yonder, to become Dame Goldthred. She hath jumped out of the window of old Gaffer Thackham's grange; and yonder she stands at the place where she should have met the palfrey, with her camlet riding cloak and ivory-handled whip, like a picture of Lot's wife. I pray you, in good terms, let me have back the palfrey."

"Grieved am I," said Wayland, "as much for the fair damsel as for thee. But vows must have their course; thou wilt find the palfrey at the Angel yonder at Donnington."

"And how if you — if you forget to leave my horse, as you propose?" said Goldthred.

"My pack shall be pledged for it; yonder it lies with Giles Gosling, in his chamber with the damask'd leathern hangings, stuffed full with velvet — single, double, triple-piled."

"Hold — hold!" exclaimed the mercer; "nay, if there be, in truth and sincerity, but the half of these wares — but if ever I trust bumpkin with bonny Bayard again!"

"As you list for that, good Master Goldthred, and so good

morrow to you — and well parted," he added, riding on cheerfully with the lady.

The travelers reached Donnington without further alarm, where it became matter of necessity that the countess should enjoy two or three hours' repose, during which Wayland disposed himself, with equal address and alacrity, to carry through those measures on which the safety of their future journey seemed to depend.

Exchanging his peddler's cloak for a smock-frock, he led the palfrey of Goldthred to the Angel Inn, which was at the other end of the village from that where our travelers had taken up their quarters, and left it there to be reclaimed by the mercer.

He then procured such change of apparel for the lady, as well as himself, as gave them both the appearance of country people of the better class; it being further resolved that, in order to attract the less observation, she should pass upon the road for the sister of her guide. A good, but not a gay horse, fit to keep pace with his own, and gentle enough for a lady's use, completed the preparations for the journey; for making which, and for other expenses, he had been furnished with sufficient funds by Tresilian. And thus, about noon, after the countess had been refreshed by the sound repose of several hours, they resumed their journey, with the purpose of making the best of their way to Kenilworth, by Coventry and Warwick.

It is necessary to premise, that the landlord of the inn had informed them that a jovial party, intended, as he understood, to present some of the masques or mummeries which made a part of the entertainment with which the Queen was usually welcomed on the royal progresses, had left the village of Donnington an hour or two before them, in order to proceed to Kenilworth. Now it had occurred to Wayland that, by attaching themselves in some sort to this group, as soon as they should overtake them on the road, they would be less likely to attract notice than if they continued to travel entirely by themselves. He communicated his idea to the countess, who, only anxious to

arrive at Kenilworth without interruption, left him free to choose the manner in which this was to be accomplished. They pressed forward their horses, therefore, with the purpose of overtaking the party of intended revelers, and making the journey in their company; and had just seen the little party, consisting partly of riders, partly of people on foot, crossing the summit of a gentle hill, at about half a mile's distance, and disappearing on the other side, when Wayland, who maintained the most circumspect observation of all that met his eye in every direction, was aware that a rider was coming up behind them on a horse of uncommon action, accompanied by a serving-man, whose utmost efforts were unable to keep up with his master's trotting hackney, and who, therefore, was fain to follow him at a hand gallop. Wayland looked anxiously back at these horsemen, became considerably disturbed in manner, looked back again, and became pale, as he said to the lady — "That is Richard Varney's trotting gelding; I would know him among a thousand nags; this is worse business than meeting the mercer."

"Draw your sword," answered the lady, "and pierce my bosom with it, rather than I should fall into his hands!"

"I would rather by a thousand times," answered Wayland, "pass it through his body, or even mine own. He has a serving-man, too, and I think it is the drunken ruffian Lambourne, upon the horse on which men say he did the great robbery of the west country grazier. It is not that I fear either Varney or Lambourne in a good cause — your palfrey will go yet faster if you urge him — but yet — nay, I pray you let him not break off into the gallop, lest they should see we fear them, and give chase; keep him only at the full trot — but yet, though I fear them not, I would we were well rid of them, and that rather by policy than by violence."

While he thus spoke, he alternately urged and restrained his horse, desirous to maintain the fleetest pace that was consistent with the idea of an ordinary journey on the road, but to avoid

such rapidity of movement as might give rise to suspicion that they were flying.

At such a pace, they ascended the gentle hill we have mentioned, and, looking from the top, had the pleasure to see that the party which had left Donnington before them were in the little valley or bottom on the other side, where the road was traversed by a rivulet, beside which was a cottage or two. In this place they seemed to have made a pause, which gave Wayland the hope of joining them, and becoming a part of their company, ere Varney should overtake them. He was the more anxious, as his companion, though she made no complaints and expressed no fear, began to look so deadly pale that he was afraid she might drop from her horse. Notwithstanding this symptom of decaying strength, she pushed on her palfrey so briskly that they joined the party in the bottom of the valley ere Varney appeared on the top of the gentle eminence which they had descended.

They found the company to which they meant to associate themselves in great disorder. The women were running in and out of one of the cottages, and the men were standing around the horses.

Wayland and his charge paused, as if out of curiosity, and then gradually, without making any inquiries, or being asked any questions, they mingled with the group, as if they had always made part of it.

They had not stood there above five minutes, anxiously keeping as much to the side of the road as possible, so as to place the other travelers betwixt them and Varney, when Lord Leicester's master of the horse, followed by Lambourne, came riding fiercely down the hill, their horses' flanks and the rowels of their spurs showing bloody tokens of the rate at which they traveled. The appearance of the stationary group around the cottages, wearing their buckram suits in order to protect their masquing dresses, having their light cart for transporting their scenery, and

carrying various fantastic properties in their hands for the more easy conveyance, let the riders at once into the character and purpose of the company.

"You are revelers," said Varney, "designing for Kenilworth?"

"Right," answered one of the party.

"And why stand you here," said Varney, "when your utmost despatch will but bring you to Kenilworth in time? The Queen dines at Warwick to-morrow."

"In very truth, sir," said a little diminutive urchin, wearing a vizard with a couple of sprouting horns of an elegant scarlet hue, having moreover a black serge jerkin drawn close to his body by lacing, garnished with red stockings, and shoes so shaped as to resemble cloven feet — "in very truth, sir, and you are in the right on't. It is my father the devil, who has delayed our present purpose, by increasing our company with an imp too many."

"The devil he has!" answered Varney, whose laugh, however, never exceeded a sarcastic smile. "But who were those, a man and a woman, I think, who rode so hastily up the hill before me even now? Do they belong to your company?"

Wayland was about to hazard a reply to this alarming inquiry, when the little fellow again thrust in his oar.

"So please you," he said, coming close up to Varney, and speaking so as not to be overheard by his companions, "the man was our devil-major; and the woman, if you please, is the sage person whose assistance is most particularly necessary."

"Oh, what, you have got the wise woman, then?" said Varney. "Why, truly, she rode like one bound to a place where she was needed. Here is something for you all to drink the lucky hour; and so, as the play says, 'God be with your labor!'"

Thus speaking, he struck his horse with the spurs, and rode on his way.

Lambourne tarried a moment or two behind his master, and

rummaged his pouch for a piece of silver, which he bestowed on the communicative imp. Then, having received the boy's thanks for his generosity, he also spurred his horse, and rode after his master as fast as the fire flashes from flint.

"And now," said the wily imp, sidling close up to Wayland's horse, and cutting a gambol in the air, which seemed to vindicate his title to relationship with the prince of that element, "I have told them who *you* are, do you in return tell me who *I* am?"

"Either Fibbertigibbet," answered Wayland Smith, "or else an imp of the devil in good earnest."

"Thou hast hit it," answered Dickie Sludge; "I am thine own Flibbertigibbet, man; and I have broken forth of bounds, along with my learned preceptor, as I told thee I would do, whether he would or not. But what lady hast thou got with thee? I saw thou wert at fault the first question was asked, and so I drew up for thy assistance. But I must know all who she is, dear Wayland."

"Thou shalt know fifty finer things, my dear ingie," said Wayland; "but a truce to thine inquiries just now; and since you are bound for Kenilworth, thither will I too, even for the love of thy sweet face and waggish company."

"Thou shouldst have said my waggish face and sweet company," said Dickie; "but how wilt thou travel with us — I mean in what character?"

"E'en in that thou hast assigned me, to be sure — as a juggler; thou know'st I am used to the craft," answered Wayland.

"Ay, but the lady?" answered Flibbertigibbet; "credit me, I think she *is* one, and thou art in a sea of troubles about her at this moment, as I can perceive by thy fidgeting."

"O, she, man! — she is a poor sister of mine," said Wayland. "She can sing and play o' the lute, would win the fish out o' the stream."

"Let me hear her instantly," said the boy. "I love the lute rarely — I love it of all things, though I never heard it."

"Then how canst thou love it, Flibbertigibbet?" said Wayland.

"As knights love ladies in old tales," answered Dickie, "on hearsay."

"Then love it on hearsay a little longer, till my sister is recovered from the fatigue of her journey," said Wayland.

He then proceeded to state to Master Holiday his own talents as a juggler, with those of his sister as a musician. Some proof of his dexterity was demanded, which he gave in such a style of excellence that, delighted at obtaining such an accession to their party, they readily acquiesced in the apology which he offered when a display of his sister's talents was required. The newcomers were invited to partake of the refreshments with which the party were provided; and it was with some difficulty that Wayland Smith obtained an opportunity of being apart with his supposed sister during the meal, of which interval he availed himself to entreat her to forget for the present both her rank and her sorrows, and condescend, as the most probable chance of remaining concealed, to mix in the society of those with whom she was to travel.

The countess allowed the necessity of the case, and when they resumed their journey, endeavored to comply with her guide's advice by addressing herself to a female near her.

The good dame, who was to play Rare Gillian of Croydon in one of the interludes, took care that silence did not again settle on the journey, but entertained her companion with a thousand anecdotes of revels, from the days of King Harry downwards, with the reception given them by the great folk, and all the names of those who played the principal characters, but ever concluding with "They would be nothing to the princely pleasures of Kenilworth."

"And when shall we reach Kenilworth?" said the countess.

"We that have horses may, with late riding, get to Warwick to-night, and Kenilworth may be distant some four or five miles;

but then we must wait till the foot people come up; although it is like my good Lord of Leicester will have horses or light carriages to meet them, and bring them up without being travel-toiled, which last is no good preparation, as you may suppose, for dancing before your betters. And yet, Lord help me, I have seen the day I would have tramped five leagues of lea-land, and turned on my toe the whole evening after, as a juggler spins a pewter platter on the point of a needle."

If the countess was overwhelmed with the garrulity of this good dame, Wayland Smith, on his part, had enough to do to sustain and parry the constant attacks made upon him by the indefatigable curiosity of his old acquaintance, Richard Sludge.

"That sister of thine, Wayland," he said, "has a fair neck to have been born in a smithy, and a pretty taper hand to have been used for twirling a spindle; faith, I'll believe in your relationship when the crow's egg is hatched into a cygnet."

"Go to," said Wayland, "thou art a prating boy, and should be breeched for thine assurance."

"Well," said the imp, drawing off, "all I say is, remember you have kept a secret from me, and if I give thee not a Rowland for thine Oliver, my name is not Dickon Sludge!"

This threat, and the distance at which Hobgoblin kept from him for the rest of the way, alarmed Wayland very much, and he suggested to his pretended sister that, on pretext of weariness, she should express a desire to stop two or three miles short of the fair town of Warwick, promising to rejoin the troop in the morning. A small village inn afforded them a resting place; and it was with secret pleasure that Wayland saw the whole party, including Dickon, pass on, after a courteous farewell, and leave them behind.

"To-morrow, madam," he said to his charge, "we will, with your leave, again start early, and reach Kenilworth before the rout which are to assemble there."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE unfortunate Countess of Leicester had, from her infancy upwards, been treated by those around her with indulgence as unbounded as injudicious. From the same indulgence, it followed that she had only been accustomed to form and to express her wishes, leaving to others the task of fulfilling them; and thus, at the most momentous period of her life, she was alike destitute of presence of mind and of ability to form for herself any reasonable or prudent plan of conduct. These difficulties pressed on the unfortunate lady with overwhelming force, on the morning which seemed to be the crisis of her fate.

A sleepless night rendered her so weak that she was altogether unable to attend Wayland's early summons. The trusty guide became extremely distressed on the lady's account, and somewhat alarmed on his own, and was on the point of going alone to Kenilworth, in the hope of discovering Tressilian, and intimating to him the lady's approach, when about nine in the morning he was summoned to attend her. He found her dressed, and ready for resuming her journey, but with a paleness of countenance which alarmed him for her health. She intimated her desire that the horses might be got instantly ready, and resisted with impatience her guide's request that she would take some refreshment before setting forward. "I have had," she said, "a cup of water: the wretch who is dragged to execution needs no stronger cordial, and that may serve me which suffices for him; do as I command you." Wayland Smith still hesitated. "What would you have?" said she. "Have I not spoken plainly?"

"Yes, madam," answered Wayland; "but may I ask what is your further purpose? I only desire to know, that I may guide myself by your wishes. The whole country is afloat, and stream-

ing towards the Castle of Kenilworth. It will be difficult traveling thither, even if we had the necessary passports for safe-conduct and free admittance. Unknown and unfriended, we may come by mishap. Your ladyship will forgive my speaking my poor mind. Were we not better try to find out the masquers, and again join ourselves with them?" The countess shook her head, and her guide proceeded, "Then I see but one other remedy."

"Speak out, then," said the lady, not displeased, perhaps, that he should thus offer the advice which she was ashamed to ask; "I believe thee faithful — what wouldst thou counsel?"

"That I should warn Master Tressilian," said Wayland, "that you are in this place. I am right certain he would get to horse with a few of Lord Sussex's followers, and ensure your personal safety."

"And is it to *me* you advise," said the countess, "to put myself under the protection of Sussex, the unworthy rival of the noble Leicester?" Then, seeing the surprise with which Wayland stared upon her, and afraid of having too strongly intimated her interest in Leicester, she added, "And for Tressilian, it must not be: mention not to him, I charge you, my unhappy name; it would but double *my* misfortunes, and involve *him* in dangers beyond the power of rescue." She paused; but when she observed that Wayland continued to look on her with that anxious and uncertain gaze which indicated a doubt whether her brain was settled, she assumed an air of composure, and added, "Do thou but guide me to Kenilworth Castle, good fellow, and thy task is ended, since I will then judge what farther is to be done. Thou hast yet been true to me; here is something that will make thee rich amends."

She offered the artist a ring, containing a valuable stone. Wayland looked at it, hesitated a moment, and then returned it.

"Not," he said, "that I am above your kindness, madam,

being but a poor fellow, who have been forced, God help me! to live by worse shifts than the bounty of such a person as you. But, as my old master the farrier used to say to his customers, 'No cure, no pay.' We are not yet in Kenilworth Castle. I go to get the horses; meantime, let me pray you once more, as your poor physician, as well as guide, to take some sustenance."

Shortly afterwards the horses appeared at the latticed window; the lady mounted, and found that relief from the free air and change of place which is frequently experienced in similar circumstances.

It chanced well for the countess's purpose that Wayland Smith was intimate with all the byroads, as well as direct communications, through the beautiful county of Warwick. For such and so great was the throng which flocked in all directions towards Kenilworth, to see the entry of Elizabeth into that splendid mansion of her prime favorite, that the principal roads were actually blocked up and interrupted, and it was only by circuitous bypaths that the travelers could proceed on their journey.

The Queen's purveyors had been abroad, sweeping the farms and villages of those articles usually exacted during a royal progress, and for which the owners were afterwards to obtain a tardy payment from the Board of Green Cloth. The Earl of Leicester's household officers had been scouring the country for the same purpose; and many of his friends and allies, both near and remote, took this opportunity of ingratiating themselves by sending large quantities of provisions and delicacies of all kinds, with game in huge numbers, and whole tuns of the best liquors, foreign and domestic. Thus the highroads were filled with droves of bullocks, sheep, calves, and hogs, and choked with loaded wains, whose axletrees cracked under their burdens of wine casks and hogsheads of ale, and huge hampers of grocery goods, and slaughtered game, and salted provisions, and sacks of flour.

Here were, besides, players and mummers, jugglers and show-

men, of every description, traversing in joyous bands the paths which led to the Palace of Princely Pleasure; for so the traveling minstrels had termed Kenilworth in the songs which already had come forth in anticipation of the revels. In the midst of this motley show, mendicants were exhibiting their real or pretended miseries, forming a strange, though common, contrast betwixt the vanities and the sorrows of human existence. All these floated along with the immense tide of population, whom mere curiosity had drawn together; and where the mechanic, in his leathern apron, elbowed the dainty dame, his city mistress; where clowns, with hobnailed shoes, were treading on the toes of substantial burghers and gentlemen of worship; and where Joan of the dairy, with robust pace, and red, sturdy arms, rowed her way onward, amongst those prim and pretty dolls whose sires were knights and squires.

No infliction can be so distressing to a mind absorbed in melancholy as being plunged into a scene of mirth and revelry. Yet, in the case of the Countess of Leicester, the noise and tumult of this giddy scene distracted her thoughts, and rendered her this sad service, that it became impossible for her to brood on her own misery, or to form terrible anticipations of her approaching fate. She traveled on, like one in a dream, following implicitly the guidance of Wayland, who, with great address, now threaded his way through the general throng of passengers, now stood still until a favorable opportunity occurred of again moving forward, and frequently turning altogether out of the direct road, followed some circuitous bypath, which brought them into the highway again, after having given them the opportunity of traversing a considerable way with greater ease and rapidity.

It was thus he avoided Warwick, within whose castle Elizabeth had passed the previous night, and where she was to tarry until past noon, at that time the general hour of dinner throughout England; after which repast she was to proceed to Kenilworth. In the meanwhile, each passing group had something to say in

the sovereign's praise, though not absolutely without the usual mixture of satire which qualifies more or less our estimate of our neighbors, especially if they chance to be also our betters.

"Heard you," said one, "how graciously she spoke to Master Bailiff and the Recorder, and to good Master Griffin, the preacher, as they kneeled down at her coach window?"

"Ay, and how she said to little Aglionby, 'Master Recorder, men would have persuaded me that you were afraid of me, but truly I think, so well did you reckon up to me the virtues of a sovereign, that I have more reason to be afraid of you.' And then with what grace she took the fair-wrought purse with the twenty gold sovereigns, seeming as though she would not willingly handle it, and yet taking it withal."

"Ay — ay," said another, "her fingers closed on it pretty willingly methought, when all was done."

"Come, good neighbor," said the first speaker, "be not envious. She is a good queen, and a generous. She gave the purse to the Earl of Leicester."

"I envious? beshrew thy heart for the word!" replied the handicraft. "But she will give all to the Earl of Leicester anon, methinks."

"You are turning ill, lady," said Wayland Smith to the Countess of Leicester, and proposed that she should draw off from the road, and halt till she recovered. But, subduing her feelings at this and different speeches to the same purpose which caught her ear as they passed on, she insisted that her guide should proceed to Kenilworth with all the haste which the numerous impediments of their journey permitted.

At length the princely castle appeared, upon improving which, and the domains around, the Earl of Leicester had, it is said, expended sixty thousand pounds sterling, a sum equal to half a million of our present money.

The outer wall of this splendid and gigantic structure inclosed seven acres, a part of which was occupied by extensive stables,

and by a pleasure garden, with its trim arbors and parterres, and the rest formed the large base-court, or outer yard, of the noble castle. The lordly structure itself, which rose near the center of this spacious inclosure, was composed of a huge pile of magnificent castellated buildings, apparently of different ages, surrounding an inner court, and bearing, in the names attached to each portion of the magnificent mass, and in the armorial bearings which were there blazoned, the emblems of mighty chiefs who had long passed away, and whose history, could Ambition have lent ear to it, might have read a lesson to the haughty favorite who had now acquired, and was augmenting, the fair domain. A large and massive keep, which formed the citadel of the castle, was of uncertain though great antiquity. It bore the name of Cæsar, perhaps from its resemblance to that in the Tower of London so called. Old John of Gaunt, "time-honored Lancaster," had widely extended the castle, erecting that noble and massive pile which yet bears the name of Lancaster's Buildings; and Leicester himself had outdone the former possessors, princely and powerful as they were, by erecting another immense structure, which now lies crushed under its own ruins, the monument of its owner's ambition. The external wall of this royal castle was, on the south and west sides, adorned and defended by a lake partly artificial, across which Leicester had constructed a stately bridge, that Elizabeth might enter the castle by a path hitherto untrodden, instead of the usual entrance to the northward, over which he had erected a gate-house, or barbican, which still exists, and is equal in extent, and superior in architecture, to the baronial castle of many a northern chief.

Beyond the lake lay an extensive chase, full of red deer, fallow deer, roes, and every species of game, and abounding with lofty trees, from amongst which the extended front and massive towers of the castle were seen to rise in majesty and beauty. We cannot but add, that of this lordly palace, where princes feasted and heroes fought, where beauty dealt the prize which valor won, all

is now desolate. The bed of the lake is but a rushy swamp; and the massive ruins of the castle only serve to show what their splendor once was, and to impress on the musing visitor the transitory value of human possessions, and the happiness of those who enjoy a humble lot in virtuous contentment.

It was with far different feelings that the unfortunate Countess of Leicester viewed those gray and massive towers, when she first beheld them rise above the embowering and richly shaded woods, over which they seemed to preside. She, the undoubted wife of the great earl, of Elizabeth's minion and England's mighty favorite, was approaching the presence of her husband and that husband's sovereign under the protection, rather than the guidance, of a poor juggler; and though unquestioned mistress of that proud castle, whose lightest word ought to have had force sufficient to make its gates leap from their massive hinges to receive her, yet she could not conceal from herself the difficulty and peril which she must experience in gaining admission into her own halls.

The risk and difficulty, indeed, seemed to increase every moment, and at length threatened altogether to put a stop to her farther progress, at the great gate leading to a broad and fair road, which, traversing the breadth of the chase for the space of two miles, was destined to form the Queen's approach to the castle on that memorable occasion.

The countess and Wayland found the gate at the end of this avenue, which opened on the Warwick road, guarded by a body of the Queen's mounted yeomen of the guard. These guards, distinguished for strength and stature, peremptorily refused all admittance, excepting to such as were guests invited to the festival, or persons who were to perform some part in the mirthful exhibitions which were proposed.

The press was of consequence great around the entrance, and persons of all kinds presented every sort of plea for admittance; to which the guards turned an inexorable ear, pleading the

strictness of their orders, founded on the Queen's well-known dislike to the rude pressing of a multitude. With those whom such reasons did not serve, they dealt more rudely, repelling them without ceremony by the pressure of their powerful barbed horses. These last maneuvers produced undulations amongst the crowd which rendered Wayland much afraid that he might perforce be separated from his charge in the throng. Neither did he know what excuse to make in order to obtain admittance, and he was debating the matter in his head with great uncertainty, when the captain, having cast an eye upon him, exclaimed, to his no small surprise, "Yeomen, make room for the fellow in the orange-tawny cloak. Come forward, sir coxcomb, and make haste. What, in the fiend's name, has kept you waiting? Come forward with your bale of woman's gear."

While the captain of the guard gave Wayland this pressing yet uncourteous invitation, which, for a minute or two, he could not imagine was applied to him, the yeomen speedily made a free passage for him, while, only cautioning his companion to keep the muffler close around her face, he entered the gate leading her palfrey, but with such a drooping crest, and such a look of conscious fear and anxiety, that the crowd accompanied their admission with hooting and a loud laugh of derision.

Wayland and his charge rode forward through the broad avenue, which was guarded on either side by a long line of retainers, armed with swords and richly dressed in the Earl of Leicester's liveries. And, indeed, when the lady obtained the first commanding view of the castle, with its stately towers rising from within a long sweeping line of outward walls, ornamented with battlements, and turrets, and platforms at every point of defense, with many a banner streaming from its walls, and such a bustle of gay crests and waving plumes disposed on the terraces and battlements, and all the gay and gorgeous scene, her heart, unaccustomed to such splendor, sank as if it died within her, and for a moment she asked herself what she had offered up to

Leicester to deserve to become the partner of this princely splendor. But her pride and generous spirit resisted the whisper which bade her despair.

"I have given him," she said, "all that woman has to give. Name and fame, heart and hand, have I given the lord of all this magnificence at the altar, and England's queen could give him no more. He is my husband; I am his wife. He will be something impatient at my disobeying him; but Amy will weep, and Dudley will forgive her."

These meditations were interrupted by a cry of surprise from her guide Wayland, who suddenly felt himself grasped firmly round the body by a pair of long, thin black arms, belonging to some one who had dropped himself out of an oak tree upon the croup of his horse.

"This must be the devil or Flibbertigibbet again!" said Wayland, after a vain struggle to disengage himself and unhorse the urchin who clung to him. "Do Kenilworth oaks bear such acorns?"

"In sooth do they, Master Wayland," said his unexpected adjunct, "and many others too hard for you to crack, for as old as you are, without my teaching you. How would you have passed the guard at the upper gate yonder, had not I warned the captain that our principal juggler was to follow us?"

"Nay, then, thou art a limb of the devil in good earnest," said Wayland. "I give thee way, good imp, and will walk by thy counsel; only as thou art powerful, be merciful."

As he spoke, they approached a strong tower, at the south extremity of the long bridge we have mentioned, which served to protect the outer gateway of the Castle of Kenilworth.

Under such disastrous circumstances, and in such singular company, did the unfortunate Countess of Leicester approach for the first time the magnificent abode of her almost princely husband.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN the Countess of Leicester arrived at the outer gate of the Castle of Kenilworth, she found the tower, beneath which its ample portal arch opened, guarded in a singular manner. Upon the battlements were placed gigantic warders, with clubs, battle-axes, and other implements of ancient warfare, designed to represent the soldiers of King Arthur. Some of these tremendous figures were real men, dressed up with vizards and buskins; others were mere pageants composed of pasteboard and buckram, which, viewed from beneath, and mingled with those that were real, formed a sufficiently striking representation of what was intended. But the gigantic porter who waited at the gate beneath, and actually discharged the duties of warder, owed none of his terrors to fictitious means. He was a man whose huge stature, thews, sinews, and bulk in proportion, would have enabled him to enact any giant of romance. The legs and knees of this son of Anak were bare, as were his arms, from a span below the shoulder; but his feet were defended with sandals, fastened with cross straps of scarlet leather, studded with brazen knobs. A close jerkin of scarlet velvet, looped with gold, with short breeches of the same, covered his body and a part of his limbs; and he wore on his shoulders, instead of a cloak, the skin of a black bear. The head of this formidable person was uncovered, except by his shaggy black hair, which descended on either side around features of that huge, lumpish, and heavy cast which are often annexed to men of very uncommon size. This tremendous warder was appropriately armed with a heavy club spiked with steel. In fine, he represented excellently one of those giants of popular romance who figure in every fairy tale or legend of knight-errantry.

The demeanor of this modern Titan had in it something arguing much mental embarrassment and vexation; for sometimes he sat down for an instant on a massive stone bench, and then ever and

anon he started up, scratching his huge head, and striding to and fro on his post, like one under a fit of impatience and anxiety. It was while the porter was pacing before the gate in this agitated manner that Wayland, modestly, yet as a matter of course, was about to pass him and enter the portal arch. The porter, however, stopped his progress, bidding him, in a thundering voice, "Stand back!" and enforcing his injunction by heaving up his steel-shod mace, and dashing it on the ground before Wayland's horse's nose with such vehemence that the pavement flashed fire and the archway rang to the clamor.

"Stand still," whispered Flibbertigibbet into Wayland's ear; "I know where the shoe pinches, and will tame him in an instant."

He dropped down from the horse, and skipping up to the porter, plucked him by the tail of the bearskin, so as to induce him to decline his huge head, and whispered something in his ear. Not at the command of the lord of some Eastern talisman did ever Afrite change his horrid frown into a look of smooth submission more suddenly than the gigantic porter of Kenilworth relaxed the terrors of his look at the instant Flibbertigibbet's whisper reached his ears. He flung his club upon the ground and caught up Dickie Sludge, raising him to such a distance from the earth as might have proved perilous had he chanced to let him slip.

"It is even so," he said, with a thundering sound of exultation — "it is even so, my little dandieprat. But who the devil could teach it thee?"

"Do not thou care about that," said Flibbertigibbet; "but —" he looked at Wayland and the lady, and then sunk what he had to say in a whisper, which needed not be a loud one, as the giant held him for his convenience close to his ear. The porter then gave Dickie a warm caress, and set him on the ground with the same care which a careful housewife uses in replacing a cracked china cup upon her mantelpiece, calling out at the same

time to Wayland and the lady, "In with you — in with you; and take heed how you come too late another day when I chance to be porter."

"Ay — ay, in with you," added Flibbertigibbet; "I will be with you anon, and at the bottom of all your secrets, were they as deep and dark as the castle dungeon."

"I do believe thou wouldst," said Wayland; "but I trust the secret will be soon out of my keeping, and then I shall care the less whether thou or any one knows it."

They now crossed the entrance tower, which obtained the name of the Gallery Tower from the following circumstance:—The whole bridge, extending from the entrance to another tower on the opposite side of the lake, called Mortimer's Tower, was so disposed as to make a spacious tilt-yard, about one hundred and thirty yards in length and ten in breadth, strewn with the finest sand, and defended on either side by strong and high palisades. The broad and fair gallery, destined for the ladies who were to witness the feats of chivalry presented on this area, was erected on the northern side of the outer tower to which it gave name. Our travelers passed slowly along the bridge or tilt-yard, and arrived at Mortimer's Tower, the gate of which was guarded by many warders in rich liveries; but they offered no opposition to the entrance of the countess and her guide. They entered accordingly, in silence, the great outward court of the castle, having then full before them that vast and lordly pile, with all its stately towers, each gate open, as if in sign of unlimited hospitality, and the apartments filled with noble guests of every degree, besides dependants, retainers, domestics of every description, and all the appendages and promoters of mirth and revelry.

Amid this stately and busy scene, Wayland halted his horse, and looked upon the lady, as if waiting her commands. As she remained silent, Wayland, after waiting a minute or two, ventured to ask her, in direct terms, what were her next commands. She

raised her hand to her forehead, as if in the act of collecting her thoughts and resolution, while she answered him in a low and suppressed voice, like the murmurs of one who speaks in a dream. "Commands! I may indeed claim right to command, but who is there will obey me?"

Then suddenly raising her head, like one who has formed a decisive resolution, she addressed a gaily dressed domestic, who was crossing the court with importance and bustle in his countenance. "Stop, sir," she said, "I desire to speak with the Earl of Leicester."

"With whom, an it please you?" said the man, surprised at the demand; and then looking upon the mean equipage of her who used towards him such a tone of authority, he added, with insolence, "Why, what Bess of Bedlam is this, would ask to see my lord on such a day as the present?"

"Friend," said the countess, "be not insolent; my business with the earl is most urgent."

"You must get some one else to do it, were it thrice as urgent," said the fellow. "I should summon my lord from the Queen's royal presence to do *your* business, should I? I were like to be thanked with a horsewhip. I marvel our old porter took not measure of such ware with his club, instead of giving them passage; but his brain is addled with getting his speech by heart."

Two or three persons stopped, attracted by the fleering way in which the serving-man expressed himself; and Wayland, alarmed both for himself and the lady, hastily addressed himself to one who appeared the most civil, and thrusting a piece of money into his hand, held a moment's counsel with him on the subject of finding a place of temporary retreat for the lady. The person to whom he spoke, being one in some authority, rebuked the others for their incivility, and commanding one fellow to take care of the strangers' horses, he desired them to follow him. The countess retained presence of mind sufficient to see that it

was absolutely necessary she should comply with his request; and, leaving the rude lackeys and grooms to crack their brutal jests about light heads, light heels, and so forth, Wayland and she followed in silence the deputy usher, who undertook to be their conductor.

They entered the inner court of the castle by the great gateway, and were conducted by their guide to a small but strong tower, occupying the northeast angle of the building adjacent to the great hall, and filling up a space betwixt the immense range of kitchens and the end of the great hall itself. The lower part of this tower was occupied by some of the household officers of Leicester, owing to its convenient vicinity to the places where their duty lay; but in the upper story, which was reached by a narrow winding stair, was a small octangular chamber, which, in the great demand for lodgings, had been on the present occasion fitted up for the reception of guests, though generally said to have been used as a place of confinement for some unhappy person who had been there murdered. Tradition called this prisoner Mervyn, and transferred his name to the tower. That it had been used as a prison was not improbable; for the floor of each story was arched, the walls of tremendous thickness, while the space of the chamber did not exceed fifteen feet in diameter. The window, however, was pleasant, though narrow, and commanded a delightful view of what was called the Pleasance — a space of ground inclosed and decorated with arches, trophies, statues, fountains, and other architectural monuments, which formed one access from the castle itself into the garden. There was a bed in the apartment, and other preparations for the reception of a guest, to which the countess paid but slight attention, her notice being instantly arrested by the sight of writing materials, placed on the table (not very commonly to be found in the bedrooms of those days), which instantly suggested the idea of writing to Leicester, and remaining private until she had received his answer.

The deputy usher, having introduced them into this commodious apartment, courteously asked Wayland, whose generosity he had experienced, whether he could do anything farther for his service. Upon receiving a gentle hint that some refreshment would not be unacceptable, he presently conveyed the smith to the buttery, where dressed provisions of all sorts were distributed, with hospitable profusion, to all who asked for them. Wayland was readily supplied with some light provisions, such as he thought would best suit the faded appetite of the lady, and did not omit the opportunity of himself making a hasty but hearty meal on more substantial fare. He then returned to the apartment in the turret, where he found the countess, who had finished her letter to Leicester; and, in lieu of a seal and silken thread, had secured it with a braid of her own beautiful tresses, fastened by what is called a truelove knot.

"Good friend," said she to Wayland, "whom God hath sent to aid me at my utmost need, I do beseech thee, as the last trouble you shall take for an unfortunate lady, to deliver this letter to the noble Earl of Leicester. Be it received as it may," she said, with features agitated betwixt hope and fear, "thou, good fellow, shalt have no more cumber with me. But I hope the best; and if ever lady made a poor man rich, thou hast surely deserved it at my hand, should my happy days ever come round again. Give it, I pray you, into Lord Leicester's own hand, and mark how he looks on receiving it."

Wayland, on his part, readily undertook the commission, but anxiously prayed the lady, in his turn, to partake of some refreshment; in which he at length prevailed, more through importunity, and her desire to see him begone on his errand, than from any inclination the countess felt to comply with his request. He then left her, advising her to lock her door on the inside, and not to stir from her little apartment, and went to seek an opportunity of discharging her errand, as well as of carrying into

effect a purpose of his own which circumstances had induced him to form.

In fact, from the conduct of the lady during the journey, her long fits of profound silence, the irresolution and uncertainty which appeared to pervade all her movements, and the obvious incapacity of thinking and acting for herself, under which she seemed to labor, Wayland had formed the not improbable opinion that the difficulties of her situation had in some degree affected her understanding. He therefore resolved, before delivering the letter to Leicester, that he would seek out Tressilian, and communicate to him the arrival of the lady at Kenilworth, and thus at once rid himself of all further responsibility and devolve the task of guiding and protecting this unfortunate lady upon the patron who had at first employed him in her service.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AMID the universal bustle which filled the castle and its environs, it was no easy matter to find out any individual; and Wayland was still less likely to light upon Tressilian, because he dared not make general inquiries among the retainers or domestics of Leicester. He learned, however, by indirect questions, that, in all probability, Tressilian must have been one of a large party of gentlemen in attendance on the Earl of Sussex, who had accompanied their patron that morning to Kenilworth, when Leicester had received them with marks of the most formal respect and distinction. He further learned that both earls, with their followers, and many other nobles, knights, and gentlemen, had taken horse, and gone towards Warwick several hours since, for the purpose of escorting the Queen to Kenilworth.

Wayland was not without hopes that Tressilian might be of the number. That he might not lose an opportunity of meeting his

patron in the event of this being the case, Wayland placed himself in the base court of the castle, near Mortimer's Tower. Thus stationed, nobody could enter or leave the castle without his observation, and most anxiously did he study the garb and countenance of every horseman, as, passing from under the opposite Gallery Tower, they paced slowly, or curvetted, along the tilt yard, and approached the entrance of the base court.

But while Wayland gazed thus eagerly to discover him whom he saw not, he was pulled by the sleeve by one by whom he himself would not willingly have been seen.

This was Dickie Sludge, or Flibbertigibbet. Whatever were Wayland's internal feelings, he judged it necessary to express pleasure at their unexpected meeting.

"Ha? is it thou, my miller's thumb — my little mouse?"

"Ay," said Dickie, "the mouse which gnawed asunder the toils, just when the lion who was caught in them began to look wonderfully like an ass."

"Why, thou little hop-the-gutter, thou art as sharp as vinegar this afternoon! But tell me, how didst thou come off with yonder jolter-headed giant, whom I left thee with? I was afraid he would have stripped thy clothes, and so swallowed thee, as men peel and eat a roasted chestnut."

"Had he done so," replied the boy, "he would have had more brains in his stomach than ever he had in his noddle."

"Beshrew me, Flibbertigibbet," replied Wayland, "but thou art sharper than a Sheffield whittle! I would I knew by what charm you muzzled yonder old bear."

"Ay, that is in your own manner," answered Dickie; "you think fine speeches will pass muster instead of good will. However, as to this honest porter, you must know that his brain was overburdened with a speech that had been penned for him, and which proved rather an overmatch for his gigantic faculties. Now this same pithy oration had been indited, like sundry others, by my learned magister, Erasmus Holiday, so I had heard it

often enough to remember every line. I promised, as the price of your admission, to hide me under his bearish gaberdine and prompt him in the hour of need. I have just now been getting some food in the castle, and am about to return to him."

"That's right — that's right, my dear Dickie," replied Wayland; "haste thee, for Heaven's sake! else the poor giant will be utterly disconsolate for want of his dwarfish auxiliary. Away with thee, Dickie!"

"Ay — ay!" answered the boy. "Away with Dickie, when we have got what good of him we can. You will not let me know the story of this lady, then, who you say is your sister?"

"Why, what good would it do thee, thou silly elf?" said Wayland.

"O, stand ye on these terms?" said the boy. "Well, I care not greatly about the matter; only, I never smell out a secret, but I try to be either at the right or the wrong end of it, and so good evening to ye."

So saying, he cast a somerset through the gateway, and, lighting on the bridge, ran, with the extraordinary agility which was one of his distinguishing attributes, towards the Gallery Tower, and was out of sight in an instant.

"I would to God I were safe out of this castle again!" prayed Wayland, internally; "for now that this mischievous imp has put his finger in the pie, it cannot but prove a mess fit for the devil's eating. I would to Heaven Master Tressilian would appear!"

Tressilian, whom he was thus anxiously expecting in one direction, had returned to Kenilworth by another access. It was indeed true, as Wayland had conjectured, that, in the earlier part of the day, he had accompanied the earls on their cavalcade towards Warwick, not without hope that he might in that town hear some tidings of his emissary. Being disappointed in this expectation, and observing Varney amongst Leicester's attendants, seeming as if he had some purpose of advancing to and

addressing him, he conceived, in the present circumstances, it was wisest to avoid the interview. He therefore left the presence-chamber when the high-sheriff of the county was in the very midst of his dutiful address to her Majesty; and, mounting his horse, rode back to Kenilworth by a remote and circuitous road, and entered the castle by a small sallyport in the western wall, at which he was readily admitted as one of the followers of the Earl of Sussex, towards whom Leicester had commanded the utmost courtesy to be exercised.

Having delivered his horse to the charge of his attendant, he walked for a space in the Pleasance and in the garden, rather to indulge in comparative solitude his own reflections than to admire those singular beauties of nature and art which the magnificence of Leicester had there assembled. The greater part of the persons of condition had left the castle for the present, to form part of the earl's cavalcade; others, who remained behind, were on the battlements, outer walls, and towers, eager to view the splendid spectacle of the royal entry. The garden, therefore, while every other part of the castle resounded with the human voice, was silent, but for the whispering of the leaves.

The melancholy thoughts of Tressilian cast a gloomy shade on all the objects with which he was surrounded. He compared the magnificent scenes which he here traversed with the deep woodland and wild moorland which surrounded Lidcote Hall, and the image of Amy Robsart glided like a phantom through every landscape which his imagination summoned up. But he at length became sensible of the necessity of forcing other objects upon his mind; and for this purpose he left the Pleasance, in order to mingle with the noisy crowd upon the walls, and view the preparation for the pageants. But as he left the garden, and heard the busy hum, mixed with music and laughter, which floated around him, he felt an uncontrollable reluctance to mix with society whose feelings were in a tone so different from his own, and resolved, instead of doing so, to retire to the chamber

assigned him, and employ himself in study until the tolling of the great castle bell should announce the arrival of Elizabeth.

Tressilian crossed accordingly by the passage betwixt the immense range of kitchens and the great hall, and ascended to the third story of Mervyn's Tower, and applying himself to the door of the small apartment which had been allotted to him, was surprised to find it locked. He then recollected that the deputy chamberlain had given him a master key, advising him, in the present confused state of the castle, to keep his door as much shut as possible. He applied the key to the lock, the bolt revolved, he entered, and in the same instant saw a female form seated in the apartment, and recognized that form to be Amy Robsart. His first idea was, that a heated imagination had raised the image on which it doted into visible existence; his second, that he beheld an apparition; the third and abiding conviction, that it was Amy herself, paler, indeed, and thinner than in the days of heedless happiness, when she possessed the form and hue of a wood nymph, with the beauty of a sylph; but still Amy, unequalled in loveliness by aught which had ever visited his eyes.

The astonishment of the countess was scarce less than that of Tressilian, although it was of shorter duration, because she had heard from Wayland that he was in the castle. She had started up at his first entrance, and now stood facing him, the paleness of her cheeks having given way to a deep blush.

"Tressilian," she said, at length, "why come you here?"

"Nay, why come *you* here, Amy," returned Tressilian, "unless it be at length to claim that aid which, as far as one man's heart and arm can extend, shall instantly be rendered to you?"

She was silent a moment, and then answered in a sorrowful rather than an angry tone — "I require no aid, Tressilian, and would rather be injured than benefited by any which your kindness can offer me. Believe me, I am near one whom law and love oblige to protect me."

"The villain, then, hath done you the poor justice which

remained in his power," said Tressilian; "and I behold before me the wife of Varney?"

"The wife of Varney!" she replied, with all the emphasis of scorn. "With what base name, sir, does your boldness stigmatize the — the — the ——" She hesitated, dropped her tone of scorn, looked down, and was confused and silent; for she recollected what fatal consequences might attend her completing the sentence with "the Countess of Leicester," which were the words that had naturally suggested themselves. It would have been a betrayal of the secret, on which her husband had assured her that his fortunes depended, to Tressilian, to Sussex, to the Queen, and to the whole assembled court. "Never," she thought, "will I break my promised silence. I will submit to every suspicion rather than that."

The tears rose to her eyes as she stood silent before Tressilian; while, looking on her with mingled grief and pity, he said, "Alas! Amy, your eyes contradict your tongue. That speaks of a protector, willing and able to watch over you; but these tell me you are deserted by the wretch to whom you have attached yourself."

She looked on him, with eyes in which anger sparkled through her tears, but only repeated the word "wretch!" with a scornful emphasis.

"Yes, *wretch!*" said Tressilian; "for were he aught better, why are you here, and alone in my apartment? Why was not fitting provision made for your honorable reception?"

"In your apartment?" repeated Amy — "in *your* apartment? It shall instantly be relieved of my presence." She hastened towards the door; but the sad recollection of her deserted state at once pressed on her mind, and, pausing on the threshold, she added, in a tone unutterably pathetic, "Alas! I had forgot; I know not where to go ——"

"I see — I see it all," said Tressilian, springing to her side, and leading her back to the seat, on which she sunk down. "You *do* need aid — you *do* need protection, though you will

not own it; and you shall not need it long. Leaning on my arm, as the representative of your excellent and broken-hearted father, on the very threshold of the castle gate, you shall meet Elizabeth; and the first deed she shall do in the halls of Kenilworth shall be an act of justice to her sex and her subjects. Strong in my good cause and in the Queen's justice, the power of her minion shall not shake my resolution. I will instantly seek Sussex."

"Not for all that is under heaven!" said the countess, much alarmed and feeling the absolute necessity of obtaining time, at least, for consideration. "Tressilian, you were wont to be generous. Grant me one request, and believe, if it be your wish to save me from misery and from madness, you will do more by making me the promise I ask of you than Elizabeth can do for me with all her power!"

"Ask me anything for which you can allege reason," said Tressilian; "but demand not of me ——"

"O, limit not your boon, dear Edmund!" exclaimed the countess, — "you once loved that I should call you so, — limit not your boon to reason! — for my case is all madness, and frenzy must guide the counsels which alone can aid me."

"If you speak thus wildly," said Tressilian, astonishment again overpowering both his grief and his resolution, "I must believe you indeed incapable of thinking or acting for yourself."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, sinking on one knee before him, "I am not mad. I am but a creature unutterably miserable, and, from circumstances the most singular, dragged on to a precipice by the arm of him who thinks he is keeping me from it — even by yours, Tressilian — by yours, whom I have honored, respected, all but loved — and yet loved, too — loved, too, Tressilian, though not as you wished me."

There was an energy — a self-possession — an abandonment in her voice and manner — a total resignation of herself to his generosity, which, together with the kindness of her expressions

to himself, moved him deeply. He raised her, and in broken accents entreated her to be comforted.

"I cannot," she said, "I will not be comforted till you grant me my request! I will speak as plainly as I dare. I am now awaiting the commands of one who has a right to issue them. The interference of a third person — of you in especial, Tressilian — will be ruin — utter ruin to me. Wait but four-and-twenty hours, and it may be that the poor Amy may have the means to show that she values, and can reward, your disinterested friendship — that she is happy herself, and has the means to make you so. It is surely worth your patience, for so short a space?"

Tressilian paused, and weighing in his mind the various probabilities which might render a violent interference on his part more prejudicial than advantageous, both to the happiness and reputation of Amy; considering also that she was within the walls of Kenilworth, and could suffer no injury in a castle honored with the Queen's residence, and filled with her guards and attendants, he conceived, upon the whole, that he might render her more evil than good service by intruding upon her his appeal to Elizabeth in her behalf.

"Amy," he said, "I have ever remarked that, when others called thee girlish and willful, there lay under that external semblance of youthful and self-willed folly deep feeling and strong sense. In this I will confide, trusting your own fate in your own hands for the space of twenty-four hours, without my interference by word or act."

"Do you promise me this, Tressilian?" said the countess. "Is it possible you can yet repose so much confidence in me? Do you promise, as you are a gentleman and a man of honor, to intrude in my matters, neither by speech nor action, whatever you may see or hear that seems to you to demand your interference? Will you so far trust me?"

"I will, upon my honor," said Tressilian; "but when that space is expired ——"

"When that space is expired," she said, interrupting him, "you are free to act as your judgment shall determine."

"Is there nought besides which I can do for you, Amy?" said Tressilian.

"Nothing," said she, "save to leave me; that is, if — I blush to acknowledge my helplessness by asking it — if you can spare me the use of this apartment for the next twenty-four hours."

"This is most wonderful!" said Tressilian; "what hope or interest can you have in a castle where you cannot command even an apartment?"

"Argue not, but leave me," she said; and added, as he slowly and unwillingly retired, "Generous Edmund! the time may come when Amy may show she deserved thy noble attachment."

CHAPTER XXV.

TRESSILIAN walked into the outer yard of the castle, scarce knowing what to think of his late strange and most unexpected interview with Amy Robsart, and dubious if he had done well, being entrusted with the delegated authority of her father, to pass his word so solemnly to leave her to her own guidance for so many hours. Yet how could he have denied her request?

While he was thus balancing the advantages and perils which attended her unexpected presence in Kenilworth, Tressilian was hastily and anxiously accosted by Wayland, who, after ejaculating, "Thank God, your worship is found at last!" proceeded with breathless caution to pour into his ear the intelligence that the lady had escaped from Cumnor Place.

"And is at present in this castle," said Tressilian; "I know it, and I have seen her. Was it by her own choice she found refuge in my apartment?"

"No," answered Wayland; "but I could think of no other way of safely bestowing her, and was but too happy to find a

deputy usher who knew where you were quartered — in jolly society truly, the hall on the one hand and the kitchen on the other!"

"Peace, this is no time for jesting," answered Tressilian, sternly.

"I wot that but too well," said the artist, "for I have felt these three days as if I had an halter round my neck. This lady knows not her own mind; she will have none of your aid — commands you not to be named to her — and is about to put herself into the hands of my Lord Leicester. I had never got her safe into your chamber, had she known the owner of it."

"Is it possible?" said Tressilian. "But she may have hopes the earl will exert his influence in her favor over his villainous dependent."

"I know nothing of that," said Wayland; "but I believe, if she is to reconcile herself with either Leicester or Varney, the side of the Castle of Kenilworth which will be safest for us will be the outside, from which we can fastest fly away. It is not my purpose to abide an instant after delivery of the letter to Leicester, which waits but your commands to find its way to him. See, here it is; but no — a plague on it — I must have left it in my dog-hole, in the hayloft yonder, where I am to sleep."

"Death and fury!" said Tressilian, transported beyond his usual patience; "thou hast not lost that on which may depend a stake more important than a thousand such lives as thine?"

"Lost it!" answered Wayland, readily; "that were a jest indeed! No, sir, I have it carefully put up with my night sack, and some matters I have occasion to use. I will fetch it in an instant."

"Do so," said Tressilian; "be faithful, and thou shalt be well rewarded. But if I have reason to suspect thee, a dead dog were in better case than thou!"

Wayland bowed, and took his leave with seeming confidence and alacrity; but, in fact, filled with the utmost dread and con-

fusion. The letter was lost, that was certain, notwithstanding the apology which he had made to appease the impatient displeasure of Tressilian. It was lost; it might fall into wrong hands; it would then, certainly, occasion a discovery of the whole intrigue in which he had been engaged; nor, indeed, did Wayland see much prospect of its remaining concealed in any event. He felt much hurt, besides, at Tressilian's burst of impatience.

"Nay, if I am to be paid in this coin for services where my neck is concerned, it is time I should look to myself. Here have I offended, for aught I know, to the death the lord of this stately castle, whose word were as powerful to take away my life as the breath which speaks it to blow out a farthing candle. And all this for a mad lady and a melancholy gallant, who, on the loss of a four-nooked bit of paper, has his hand on his poignado, and swears death and fury! Then there is the doctor and Varney — I will save myself from the whole mess of them. Life is dearer than gold; I will fly this instant, though I leave my reward behind me."

These reflections naturally enough occurred to a mind like Wayland's, who found himself engaged far deeper than he had expected in a train of mysterious and unintelligible intrigues, in which the actors seemed hardly to know their own course. And yet, to do him justice, his personal fears were, in some degree, counterbalanced by his compassion for the deserted state of the lady.

"I care not a groat for Master Tressilian," he said; "I have done more than bargain by him, and have brought his errant-damozel within his reach, so that he may look after her himself; but I fear the poor thing is in much danger amongst these stormy spirits. I will to her chamber, and tell her the fate which has befallen her letter, that she may write another if she list. She cannot lack a messenger, I trow, where there are so many lackeys that can carry a letter to their lord. And I will tell her

also that I leave the castle, trusting her to God, her own guidance, and Master Tressilian's care and looking after. Perhaps she may remember the ring she offered me; it was well earned, I trow. But she is a lovely creature, and — marry hang the ring! I will not bear a base spirit for the matter. If I fare ill in this world for my good nature, I shall have better chance in the next. So now for the lady, and then for the road."

With the stealthy step and jealous eye of the cat that steals on her prey, Wayland resumed the way to the countess's chamber, sliding along by the side of the courts and passages, alike observant of all around him and studious himself to escape observation. In this manner he crossed the outward and inward castle yard, and the great arched passage, which, running betwixt the range of kitchen offices and the hall, led to the bottom of the little winding stair that gave access to the chambers of Mervyn's Tower.

The artist congratulated himself on having escaped the various perils of his journey, and was in the act of ascending by two steps at once, when he observed that the shadow of a man, thrown from a door which stood ajar, darkened the opposite wall of the staircase. Wayland drew back cautiously, went down to the inner courtyard, spent about a quarter of an hour, which seemed at least quadruple its usual duration, in walking from place to place, and then returned to the tower, in hopes to find the lurker had disappeared. He ascended as high as the suspicious spot — there was no shadow on the wall; he ascended a few yards farther — the door was still ajar, and he was doubtful whether to advance or retreat, when it was suddenly thrown wide open, and Michael Lambourne bolted out upon the astonished Wayland. "Who the devil art thou? and what seek'st thou in this part of the castle? March into that chamber, and be hanged to thee!"

"I am no dog, to go at every man's whistle," said the artist, affecting a confidence which was belied by a timid shake in his voice.

“ Say’st thou me so ? Come hither, Laurence Staples.’

A huge, ill-made and ill-looking fellow, upwards of six feet high, appeared at the door, and Lambourne proceeded: “ If thou be’st so fond of this tower, my friend, thou shalt see its foundations, good twelve feet below the bed of the lake, and tenanted by certain jolly toads, snakes, and so forth, which thou wilt find mighty good company. Therefore, once more I ask you in fair play what thou seek’st here ? ”

“ If the dungeon grate once clashes behind me,” thought Wayland, “ I am a gone man.” He therefore answered submissively.

“ I came here to see my sister, who is in Master Tressilian’s chamber, just above.”

“ Sister or no sister, thou diest on point of fox, if thou comest a-prying to this tower once more. And now I think of it — uds daggers and death ! — I will see thee out of the castle, for this is a main concern. Laurence, do thou bring him along.”

Laurence seized by the collar of the cloak the unresisting juggler, while Lambourne, with hasty steps, led the way to that same sallyport, or secret postern, by which Tressilian had returned to the castle.

While traversing with a rapid foot the space betwixt the tower and the sallyport, Wayland in vain racked his brain for some device which might avail the poor lady, for whom, notwithstanding his own imminent danger, he felt deep interest. But when he was thrust out of the castle, and informed by Lambourne, with a tremendous oath, that instant death would be the consequence of his again approaching it, he cast up his hands and eyes to heaven, as if to call God to witness he had stood to the uttermost in defense of the oppressed; then turned his back on the proud towers of Kenilworth, and went his way to seek a humbler and safer place of refuge.

CHAPTER XXVI:

TRESSILIAN, when Wayland had left him, remained uncertain what he ought next to do, when Raleigh and Blount came up to him arm in arm. Tressilian had no great desire for their society in the present state of his feelings, but there was no possibility of avoiding them; and indeed he felt that, bound by his promise not to approach Amy, or take any step in her behalf, it would be his best course at once to mix with general society, and to exhibit on his brow as little as he could of the anguish and uncertainty which sat heavy at his heart. He therefore made a virtue of necessity, and hailed his comrades with, "All mirth to you, gentlemen. Whence come ye?"

"From Warwick, to be sure," said Blount; "we must needs home to change our habits, like poor players, who are fain to multiply their persons to outward appearance by change of suits; and you had better do the like, Tressilian."

"Blount is right," said Raleigh; "the Queen loves such marks of deference, and notices, as wanting in respect, those who, not arriving in her immediate attendance, may appear in their soiled and ruffled riding dress. But why gettest thou not on thy braveries, Tressilian?"

"I am excluded from my apartment by a silly mistake," said Tressilian, "and separated for the time from my baggage. I was about to seek thee, to beseech a share of thy lodging."

"And welcome," said Raleigh; "it is a noble one. My Lord of Leicester has done us that kindness, and lodged us in princely fashion. I would advise you to tell your strait to the earl's chamberlain; you will have instant redress."

"Nay, it is not worth while, since you can spare me room," replied Tressilian: "I would not be troublesome. Has any one come hither with you?"

"O, ay," said Blount; "Varney, and a whole tribe of Leices-

trians, besides about a score of us honest Sussex folk. We are all, it seems, to receive the Queen at what they call the Gallery Tower, and witness some fooleries there; and then we're to remain in attendance upon the Queen in the great hall. Heaven help me, if her Grace should speak to me, I shall never know what to answer!"

"And what has detained them so long at Warwick?" said Tressilian, unwilling that their conversation should return to his own affairs.

"Such a succession of fooleries," said Blount, "as were never seen at Bartholomew Fair. But, come, let us on to this same Gallery Tower, though I see not what thou, Tressilian, canst do with thy riding dress and boots."

"I will take my station behind thee, Blount," said Tressilian, who saw that his friend's unusual finery had taken a strong hold of his imagination; "thy goodly size and gay dress will cover my defects."

"And so thou shalt, Edmund," said Blount. "In faith, I am glad thou think'st my garb well-fancied."

So saying, Blount cocked his beaver, threw out his leg, and marched manfully forward, as if at the head of his brigade of pikemen, ever and anon looking with complaisance on his crimson stockings, and the huge yellow roses which blossomed on his shoes.

Crossing the long bridge, or tilt yard, they took their station, with other gentlemen of quality, before the outer gate of the gallery, or entrance tower. The whole amounted to about forty persons, all selected as of the first rank under that of knighthood, and were disposed in double rows on either side of the gate, like a guard of honor, within the close hedge of pikes and partisans, which was formed by Leicester's retainers, wearing his liveries. The gentlemen carried no arms save their swords and daggers. These gallants were as gaily dressed as imagination could devise; and as the garb of the time permitted a great display of expen-

sive magnificence, nought was to be seen but velvet and cloth of gold and silver, ribands, feathers, gems, and golden chains.

It was the twilight of a summer night (9th July, 1575), the sun having for some time set, and all were in anxious expectation of the Queen's immediate approach. The multitude had remained assembled for many hours, and their numbers were still rather on the increase. A profuse distribution of refreshments, together with roasted oxen, and barrels of ale set a-broach in different places of the road, had kept the populace in perfect love and loyalty towards the Queen and her favorite, which might have somewhat abated had fasting been added to watching. They passed away the time, therefore, with the usual popular amusements of whooping, hallooing, shrieking, and playing rude tricks upon each other, forming the chorus of discordant sounds usual on such occasions. These prevailed all through the crowded roads and fields, and especially beyond the gate of the chase, where the greater number of the common sort were stationed; when, all of a sudden, a single rocket was seen to shoot into the atmosphere, and, at the instant, far heard over flood and field, the great bell of the castle tolled.

Immediately there was a pause of dead silence, succeeded by a deep hum of expectation, the united voice of many thousands, none of whom spoke above their breath; or, to use a singular expression, the whisper of an immense multitude.

"They come now, for certain," said Raleigh. "Tressilian, that sound is grand. We hear it from this distance, as mariners, after a long voyage, hear, upon their night-watch, the tide rush upon some distant and unknown shore."

His farther reflections were interrupted by a shout of applause from the multitude, so tremendously vociferous that the country echoed for miles around. The guards, thickly stationed upon the road by which the Queen was to advance, caught up the acclamation, which ran like wildfire to the castle, and announced to all within that Queen Elizabeth had entered the royal chase of

Kenilworth. The whole music of the castle sounded at once, and a round of artillery, with a salvo of small arms, was discharged from the battlements; but the noise of drums and trumpets, and even of the cannon themselves, was but faintly heard amidst the roaring and reiterated welcomes of the multitude.

As the noise began to abate, a broad glare of light was seen to appear from the gate of the park, and, broadening and brightening as it came nearer, advanced along the open and fair avenue that led towards the Gallery Tower; which, as we have already noticed, was lined on either hand by the retainers of the Earl of Leicester. The word was passed along the line, "The Queen! The Queen! Silence, and stand fast!" Onward came the cavalcade, illuminated by two hundred thick waxen torches, in the hands of as many horsemen, which cast a light like that of broad day all around the procession, but especially on the principal group, of which the Queen herself, arrayed in the most splendid manner, and blazing with jewels, formed the central figure. She was mounted on a milk-white horse, which she reined with peculiar grace and dignity; and in the whole of her stately and noble carriage you saw the daughter of an hundred kings.

The ladies of the court, who rode beside her Majesty, had taken especial care that their own external appearance should not be more glorious than their rank and the occasion altogether demanded, so that no inferior luminary might appear to approach the orbit of royalty. But their personal charms exhibited them as the very flower of a realm so far famed for splendor and beauty. The magnificence of the courtiers, free from such restraints as prudence imposed on the ladies, was yet more unbounded.

Leicester, who glittered like a golden image with jewels and cloth of gold, rode on her Majesty's right hand, as well in quality of her host as of her master of the horse. The black steed which he mounted had not a single white hair on his body, and was one

of the most renowned chargers in Europe, having been purchased by the earl at large expense for this royal occasion. As the noble animal chafed at the slow pace of the procession, and, arching his stately neck, champed on the silver bits which restrained him, the foam flew from his mouth and specked his well-formed limbs, as if with spots of snow. The rider well became the high place which he held and the proud steed which he bestrode; for no man in England, or perhaps in Europe, was more perfect than Dudley in horsemanship and all other exercises belonging to his quality. He was bareheaded, as were all the courtiers in the train; and the red torchlight shone upon his long curled tresses of dark hair, and on his noble features, to the beauty of which even the severest criticism could only object the lordly fault, as it may be termed, of a forehead somewhat too high. On that proud evening, those features wore all the grateful solicitude of a subject to show himself sensible of the high honor which the Queen was conferring on him, and all the pride and satisfaction which became so glorious a moment. Yet, though neither eye nor feature betrayed aught but feelings which suited the occasion, some of the earl's personal attendants remarked that he was unusually pale, and they expressed to each other their fear that he was taking more fatigue than consisted with his health.

Varney followed close behind his master, as the principal esquire in waiting, and had charge of his lordship's black velvet bonnet, garnished with a clasp of diamonds and surmounted by a white plume. He kept his eye constantly on his master; and, for reasons with which the reader is not unacquainted, was, among Leicester's numerous dependants, the one who was most anxious that his lord's strength and resolution should carry him successfully through a day so agitating. For, although Varney was one of the few — the very few — moral monsters who contrive to lull to sleep the remorse of their own bosoms, yet he knew that in the breast of his patron there was already awakened the fire that is never quenched, and that his lord felt, amid all the

pomp and magnificence we have described, the gnawing of the worm that dieth not.

The train, male and female, who attended immediately upon the Queen's person were, of course, of the bravest and the fairest — the highest born nobles and the wisest counselors of that distinguished reign, to repeat whose names were but to weary the reader. Behind came a long crowd of knights and gentlemen, whose rank and birth, however distinguished, were thrown into shade, as their persons into the rear of a procession whose front was of such august majesty.

Thus marshaled, the cavalcade approached the Gallery Tower.

It was now the part of the huge porter to step forward; but the lubbard was so overwhelmed with confusion of spirit — the contents of one immense black-jack of double ale, which he had just drank to quicken his memory, having treacherously confused the brain it was intended to clear — that he only groaned piteously, and remained sitting on his stone seat; and the Queen would have passed on without greeting, had not the gigantic warder's secret ally, Flibbertigibbet, thrust a pin into him.

The porter uttered a sort of a yell, which came not amiss into his part, started up with his club, and dealt a sound douse or two on each side of him; and then, like a coach-horse pricked by the spur, started off at once into the full career of his address, and, by dint of active prompting on the part of Dickie Sludge, delivered his speech in sounds of gigantic intonation.

Elizabeth received most graciously the homage of the Herculean porter, and, bending her head to him in requital, passed through his guarded tower, from the top of which was poured a clamorous blast of warlike music, which was replied to by other bands of minstrelsy placed at different points on the castle walls, and by others again stationed in the chase; while the tones of the one, as they yet vibrated on the echoes, were caught up and answered by new harmony from different quarters.

Amidst these bursts of music Queen Elizabeth crossed the Gallery Tower, and came upon the long bridge which extended from thence to Mortimer's Tower, and which was already as light as day, so many torches had been fastened to the palisades on either side. Most of the nobles here alighted, and sent their horses to the neighboring village of Kenilworth, following the Queen on foot, as did the gentlemen who had stood in array to receive her at the Gallery Tower.

Meanwhile, the Queen had no sooner stepped on the bridge than a new spectacle was provided; for, as soon as the music gave signal that she was so far advanced, a raft, so disposed as to resemble a small floating island, illuminated by a great variety of torches, and surrounded by floating pageants formed to represent sea-horses, on which sat Tritons, Nereids, and other fabulous deities of the seas and rivers, made its appearance upon the lake, and, issuing from behind a small heronry where it had been concealed, floated gently towards the farther end of the bridge.

On the islet appeared a beautiful woman, clad in a watchet-colored silken mantle, bound with a broad girdle, inscribed with characters like the phylacteries of the Hebrews. Her feet and arms were bare, but her wrists and ankles were adorned with gold bracelets of uncommon size. Amidst her long silky black hair she wore a crown or chaplet of artificial mistletoe, and bore in her hand a rod of ebony tipped with silver. Two nymphs attended on her, dressed in the same antique and mystical guise.

The pageant was so well managed, that this Lady of the Floating Island, having performed her voyage with much picturesque effect, landed at Mortimer's Tower, with her two attendants, just as Elizabeth presented herself before that outwork. The stranger then, in a well-penned speech, announced herself as that famous Lady of the Lake, renowned in the stories of King Arthur, who had nursed the youth of the redoubted Sir Lancelot, and whose beauty had proved too powerful both for the wisdom and the spells of the mighty Merlin. Since that early period, she had

remained possessed of her crystal dominions, she said, despite the various men of fame and might by whom Kenilworth had been successively tenanted. The Saxons, the Danes, the Normans, the Saintlowes, the Clintons, the Montforts, the Mortimers, the Plantagenets, great though they were in arms and magnificence, had never, she said, caused her to raise her head from the waters which hid her crystal palace. But a greater than all these great names had now appeared, and she came in homage and duty to welcome the peerless Elizabeth to all sport which the castle and its environs, which lake or land, could afford.

The Queen received this address also with great courtesy, and made answer in raillery, "We thought this lake had belonged to our own dominions, fair dame; but since so famed a lady claims it for hers, we will be glad at some other time to have further communing with you touching our joint interests."

With this gracious answer, the Lady of the Lake vanished.

At the same time that the Queen was about to enter the castle, that memorable discharge of fireworks by water and land took place, which Master Laneham has strained all his eloquence to describe.

"Such," says the clerk of the council-chamber door, "was the blaze of burning darts, the gleams of stars coruscant, the streams and hail of fiery sparks, lightnings of wildfire, and flight-shot of thunderbolts, with continuance, terror, and vehemency, that the heavens thundered, the waters surged, and the earth shook; and for my part, hardy as I am, it made me very vengeably afraid."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE Queen entered the base court of Kenilworth, through Mortimer's Tower, and moving on through pageants of heathen gods and heroes of antiquity, at length found her way to the great hall of the castle, gorgeously hung for her reception with the richest silken tapestry, misty with perfumes, and sounding to strains of soft and delicious music. From the highly carved oaken roof hung a superb chandelier of gilt bronze, formed like a spread eagle, whose outstretched wings supported three male and three female figures, grasping a pair of branches in each hand. The hall was thus illuminated by twenty-four torches of wax. At the upper end of the splendid apartment was a state canopy, overshadowing a royal throne, and beside it was a door, which opened to a long suite of apartments, decorated with the utmost magnificence for the Queen and her ladies, whenever it should be her pleasure to be private.

The Earl of Leicester having handed the Queen up to her throne and seated her there, knelt down before her, and kissing the hand which she held out, with an air in which romantic and respectful gallantry was happily mingled with the air of loyal devotion, he thanked her, in terms of the deepest gratitude, for the highest honor which a sovereign could render to a subject. So handsome did he look when kneeling before her, that Elizabeth was tempted to prolong the scene a little longer than there was, strictly speaking, necessity for; and ere she raised him, she passed her hand over his head, so near as almost to touch his long curled and perfumed hair, and with a movement of fondness, that seemed to intimate she would, if she dared, have made the motion a slight caress.

She at length raised him; and, standing beside the throne, he explained to her the various preparations which had been made for her amusement and accommodation, all of which received

her prompt and gracious approbation. The earl then prayed her Majesty for permission that he himself, and the nobles who had been in attendance upon her during the journey, might retire for a few minutes, and put themselves into a guise more fitting for dutiful attendance, during which space, those gentlemen of worship (pointing to Varney, Blount, Tressilian, and others), who had already put themselves into fresh attire, would have the honor of keeping her presence-chamber.

"Be it so, my lord," answered the Queen; "you could manage a theater well, who can thus command a double set of actors."

Leicester, having received this permission, retired accordingly, and was followed by those nobles who had attended the Queen to Kenilworth in person. The gentlemen who had preceded them, and were of course dressed for the solemnity, remained in attendance. But being most of them of rather inferior rank, they remained at an awful distance from the throne which Elizabeth occupied. The Queen's sharp eye soon distinguished Raleigh amongst them, with one or two others who were personally known to her, and she instantly made them a sign to approach, and accosted them very graciously. Raleigh, in particular, the adventure of whose cloak, as well as the incident of the verses, remained on her mind, was very graciously received; and to him she most frequently applied for information concerning the names and rank of those who were in presence. These he communicated concisely, and not without some traits of humorous satire, by which Elizabeth seemed much amused. "And who is yonder clownish fellow?" she said, looking at Tressilian, whose soiled dress on this occasion greatly obscured his good mien.

"A poet, if it please your Grace," replied Raleigh.

"I might have guessed that from his careless garb," said Elizabeth. "I have known some poets so thoughtless as to throw their cloaks into gutters."

"It must have been when the sun dazzled both their eyes and their judgment," answered Raleigh.

Elizabeth smiled, and proceeded — "I asked that slovenly fellow's name, and you only told me his profession."

"Tressilian is his name," said Raleigh, with internal reluctance, for he foresaw nothing favorable to his friend from the manner in which she took notice of him.

"Tressilian!" answered Elizabeth. "And where is Farnham or whatever his name is — my Lord of Leicester's man, I mean."

With still greater reluctance, Raleigh named and pointed out to her Varney, for whom the tailor had done all that art could perform in making his exterior agreeable; and who, if he had not grace, had a sort of tact and habitual knowledge of breeding which came in place of it.

The Queen turned her eye from the one to the other. "I doubt," she said, "this same poetical Master Tressilian, who is too learned, I warrant me, to remember what presence he was to appear in, may be one of those of whom Geoffrey Chaucer says wittily, the wisest clerks are not the wisest men. I remember that Varney is a smooth-fongued varlet. I doubt this fair runaway hath had reasons for breaking her faith."

To this Raleigh durst make no answer, aware how little he should benefit Tressilian by contradicting the Queen's sentiments. As these reflections passed through his active brain, the lower door was opened, and Leicester, accompanied by several of his kinsmen and of the nobles who had embraced his faction, re-entered the castle hall.

The favorite earl was now appareled all in white, his shoes being of white velvet; his understocks, or stockings, of knit silk; his upper stocks of white velvet, lined with cloth of silver, which was shown at the slashed part of the middle thigh; his doublet of cloth of silver, the close jerkin of white velvet, embroidered with silver and seed-pearl, his girdle and the scabbard of his sword of white velvet with golden buckles; his poniard and sword

hilted and mounted with gold; and over all, a rich loose robe of white satin, with a border of golden embroidery a foot in breadth. The collar of the Garter, and the azure Garter itself around his knee, completed the appointments of the Earl of Leicester; which were so well matched by his fair stature, graceful gesture, fine proportion of body; and handsome countenance, that at that moment he was admitted by all who saw him as the goodliest person whom they had ever looked upon. Sussex and the other nobles were also richly attired; but, in point of splendor and gracefulness of mien, Leicester far exceeded them all.

Elizabeth received him with great complacency. "We have one piece of royal justice," she said, "to attend to. It is a piece of justice, too, which interests us as a woman, as well as in the character of mother and guardian of the English people."

An involuntary shudder came over Leicester, as he bowed low, expressive of his readiness to receive her royal commands; and a similar cold fit came over Varney, whose eyes instantly perceived, from the change in his looks, slight as that was, of what the Queen was speaking. But Leicester had wrought his resolution up to the point which, in his crooked policy, he judged necessary; and when Elizabeth added — "It is of the matter of Varney and Tressilian we speak; is the lady in presence, my lord?" His answer was ready — "Gracious madam, she is not."

Elizabeth bent her brows and compressed her lips. "Our orders were strict and positive, my lord," was her answer —

"And should have been obeyed, good my liege," replied Leicester, "had they been expressed in the form of the lightest wish. But — Varney, step forward — this gentleman will inform your Grace of the cause why the lady (he could not force his rebellious tongue to utter the words 'his wife') cannot attend on your royal presence."

Varney advanced, and pleaded with readiness, what indeed he firmly believed, the absolute incapacity of the party (for neither

did he dare, in Leicester's presence, term her his wife) to wait on her Grace.

"Here," said he, "are attestations from a most learned physician, whose skill and honor are well known to my good Lord of Leicester; and from an honest and devout Protestant, a man of credit and substance, one Anthony Foster, the gentleman in whose house she is at present bestowed, that she now labors under an illness which altogether unfits her for such a journey as betwixt this castle and the neighborhood of Oxford."

"This alters the matter," said the Queen, taking the certificates in her hand, and glancing at their contents. "Let Tressilian come forward. Master Tressilian, we have much sympathy for your situation, the rather that you seem to have set your heart deeply on this Amy Robsart or Varney. Our power, thanks to God and the willing obedience of a loving people, is worth much, but there are some things which it cannot compass. We cannot, for example, command the affections of a giddy young girl, or make her love sense and learning better than a courtier's fine doublet; and we cannot control sickness, with which it seems this lady is afflicted, who may not, by reason of such infirmity, attend our court here, as we had required her to do. Here are the testimonials of the physician who hath her under his charge, and the gentleman in whose house she resides, so setting forth."

"Under your Majesty's favor," said Tressilian, hastily, and, in his alarm for the consequence of the imposition practiced on the Queen, forgetting, in part at least, his own promise to Amy, "these certificates speak not the truth."

"How, sir!" said the Queen. "Impeach my Lord of Leicester's veracity! But you shall have a fair hearing. In our presence the meanest of our subjects shall be heard against the proudest, and the least known against the most favored; therefore you shall be heard fairly, but beware you speak not without a warrant! Take these certificates in your own hand; look at

them carefully, and say manfully if you impugn the truth of them, and upon what evidence."

As the Queen spoke, his promise and all its consequences rushed on the mind of the unfortunate Tressilian, and while it controlled his natural inclination to pronounce that a falsehood which he knew from the evidence of his senses to be untrue, gave an indecision and irresolution to his appearance and utterance, which made strongly against him in the mind of Elizabeth, as well as of all who beheld him. He turned the papers over and over, as if he had been an idiot, incapable of comprehending their contents. The Queen's impatience began to become visible. "You are a scholar, sir," she said, "and of some note, as I have heard; yet you seem wondrous slow in reading text-hand. How say you, are these certificates true or no?"

"Madam," said Tressilian, with obvious embarrassment and hesitation, desirous to keep his word to Amy, and to give her, as he had promised, space to plead her own cause in her own way — "madam — madam, your Grace calls on me to admit evidence which ought to be proved valid by those who found their defense upon it."

"Why, Tressilian, thou art critical as well as poetical," said the Queen, bending on him a brow of displeasure; "methinks these writings, being produced in the presence of the noble earl to whom this castle pertains, and his honor being appealed to as the guarantee of their authenticity, might be evidence enough for thee. But since thou lists to be so formal — Varney, or rather my Lord of Leicester, for the affair becomes yours (these words, though spoken at random, thrilled through the earl's marrow and bones), what evidence have you as touching these certificates?"

Varney hastened to reply, preventing Leicester — "So please your Majesty, my young Lord of Oxford, who is here in presence, knows Master Anthony Foster's hand and his character."

The Earl of Oxford, a young unthrift, whom Foster had more

than once accommodated with loans on usurious interest, acknowledged, on this appeal, that he knew him as a wealthy and independent franklin, supposed to be worth much money, and verified the certificate produced to be his handwriting.

"And who speaks to the doctor's certificate?" said the Queen. "Alasco, methinks, is his name."

Masters, her Majesty's physician, acknowledged he had more than once consulted with Doctor Alasco, and spoke of him as a man of extraordinary learning and hidden acquirements, though not altogether in the regular course of practice. The Earl of Huntingdon, Lord Leicester's brother-in-law, and the old Countess of Rutland, next sang his praises, and both remembered the thin, beautiful Italian hand in which he was wont to write his receipts, and which corresponded to the certificate produced as his."

"And now, I trust, Master Tressilian, this matter is ended," said the Queen. "We will do something ere the night is older to reconcile old Sir Hugh Robsart to the match. You have done your duty something more than boldly; but we were no woman had we not compassion for the wounds which true love deals; so we forgive your audacity, and your uncleansed boots withal, which have wellnigh overpowered my Lord of Leicester's perfumes."

So spoke Elizabeth, whose nicety of scent was one of the characteristics of her organization.

But Tressilian had by this time collected himself, astonished as he had at first been by the audacity of the falsehood so feebly supported, and placed in array against the evidence of his own eyes. He rushed forward, kneeled down, and caught the Queen by the skirt of her robe. "As you are Christian woman," he said, "madam, as you are crowned queen, to do equal justice among your subjects — as you hope yourself to have fair hearing — which God grant you — at that last bar at which we must all plead, grant me one small request! Decide not this matter so

hastily. Give me but twenty-four hours' interval, and I will, at the end of that brief space, produce evidence which will show to demonstration that these certificates, which state this unhappy lady to be now ill at ease in Oxfordshire, are false as hell! "

" Let go my train, sir! " said Elizabeth, who was startled at his vehemence, though she had too much of lion in her to fear. " The fellow must be distraught. And yet, by this light, there is something strange in the vehemence of his demand. Speak, Tressilian; what wilt thou do if, at the end of these four-and-twenty hours, thou canst not confute a fact so solemnly proved as this lady's illness? "

" I will lay down my head on the block, " answered Tressilian.

" Pshaw! " replied the Queen. " God's light! thou speak'st like a fool. What head falls in England but by just sentence of English law? I ask thee, man, wilt thou, if thou shalt fail in this improbable attempt of thine, render me a good and sufficient reason why thou dost undertake it? "

Tressilian paused, and again hesitated; because he felt convinced that if, within the interval demanded, Amy should become reconciled to her husband, he would in that case do her the worst of offices by again ripping up the whole circumstances before Elizabeth, and showing how that wise and jealous princess had been imposed upon by false testimonials. The consciousness of this dilemma renewed his extreme embarrassment of look, voice, and manner; he hesitated, looked down, and on the Queen repeating her question with a stern voice and flashing eye, he admitted with faltering words, " That it might be — he could not positively — that is, in certain events — explain the reasons and grounds on which he acted. "

" Now, by the soul of King Henry, " said the Queen, " this is either moonstruck madness or very knavery! Seest thou, Raleigh, thy friend is far too Pindaric for this presence. Have him away, and make us quit of him, or it shall be the worse for him. But come back instantly thyself, when he is placed under

fitting restraint. We wish we had seen the beauty which could make such havoc in a wise man's brain."

Tressilian was again endeavoring to address the Queen, when Raleigh, in obedience to the orders he had received, interfered, and, with Blount's assistance, half led, half forced him out of the presence chamber.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"It is a melancholy matter," said the Queen, when Tressilian was withdrawn, "to see a wise and learned man's wit thus pitifully unsettled. My Lord of Leicester, we remember your suit formerly made to us in behalf of your faithful servant Varney, whose good gifts and fidelity, as they are useful to you, ought to have due reward from us, knowing well that your lordship, and all you have, are so earnestly devoted to our service. And we render Varney the honor more especially that we are a guest, and we fear a chargeable and troublesome one, under your lordship's roof; and also for the satisfaction of the good old knight of Devon, Sir Hugh Robsart, whose daughter he hath married; and we trust the especial mark of grace which we are about to confer may reconcile him to his son-in-law. Your sword, my Lord of Leicester."

The earl unbuckled his sword, and, taking it by the point, presented on bended knee the hilt to Elizabeth.

She took it slowly, drew it from the scabbard, and while the ladies who stood around turned away their eyes with real or affected shuddering, she noted with a curious eye the high polish and rich damasked ornaments upon the glittering blade.

"Had I been a man," she said, "methinks none of my ancestors would have loved a good sword better. As it is with me, I like to look on one. Richard Varney, come forth and kneel down. In the name of God and St. George, we dub thee

knight! Be faithful, brave, and fortunate. Arise, Sir Richard Varney."

Varney arose and retired, making a deep obeisance to the sovereign who had done him so much honor.

"The buckling of the spur, and what other rites remain," said the Queen, "may be finished to-morrow in the chapel; for we intend Sir Richard Varney a companion in his honors. And as we must not be partial in conferring such distinction, we mean on this matter to confer with our cousin of Sussex."

At the summons of Queen Elizabeth, Sussex hastily approached her person; and being asked on which of his followers, being a gentleman and of merit, he would wish the honor of knighthood to be conferred, he answered, with more sincerity than policy, that he would have ventured to speak for Tressilian, to whom he conceived he owed his own life, and who was a distinguished soldier and scholar, besides a man of unstained lineage, "only," he said, "he feared the events of that night —," and then he stopped.

"I am glad your lordship is thus considerate," said Elizabeth; "the events of this night would make us, in the eyes of our subjects, as mad as this poor brain-sick gentleman himself, should we choose this moment to do him grace."

"In that case," said the Earl of Sussex, somewhat discountenanced, "your Majesty will allow me to name my master of the horse, Master Nicholas Blount, a gentleman of fair estate and ancient name, who has served your Majesty both in Scotland and Ireland, and brought away bloody marks on his person, all honorably taken and requited."

The Queen could not help shrugging her shoulders slightly even at this second suggestion; and the Duchess of Rutland, who read in the Queen's manner that she had expected Sussex would have named Raleigh, and thus would have enabled her to gratify her own wish while she honored his recommendation, only waited the Queen's assent to what he had proposed, and then said, that

she hoped, since these two high nobles had been each permitted to suggest a candidate for the honors of chivalry, she, in behalf of the ladies in presence, might have a similar indulgence.

"I were no woman to refuse you such a boon," said the Queen, smiling.

"Then," pursued the duchess, "in the name of these fair ladies present, I request your Majesty to confer the rank of knighthood on Walter Raleigh, whose birth, deeds of arms, and promptitude to serve our sex with sword or pen, deserve such distinction from us all."

"Gramercy, fair ladies," said Elizabeth, smiling, "your boon is granted, and the gentle squire Lack-Cloak shall become the good knight Lack-Cloak at your desire. Let the two aspirants for the honor of chivalry step forward."

Blount was not as yet returned from seeing Tressilian, as he conceived, safely disposed of; but Raleigh came forth, and, kneeling down, received at the hand of the Virgin Queen that title of honor, which was never conferred on a more distinguished or more illustrious object.

Shortly afterwards, Nicholas Blount entered, and, hastily apprised by Sussex, who met him at the door of the hall, of the Queen's gracious purpose regarding him, he was desired to advance towards the throne.

The knight-expectant advanced up the hall, turning out his toes with so much zeal that he presented his leg at every step with its broad side foremost, so that it greatly resembled an old-fashioned table-knife with a curved point, when seen sideways. Leicester's friends did not suppress a titter, in which many of Sussex's partisans were unable to resist joining, though ready to eat their nails with mortification. Sussex himself lost all patience, and could not forbear whispering into the ear of his friend, "Curse thee! canst thou not walk like a man and a soldier?" an interjection which only made honest Blount start and stop, until a glance at his yellow roses and crimson stockings restored

his self-confidence, when on he went at the same pace as before.

The Queen conferred on poor Blount the honor of knighthood with a marked sense of reluctance. That wise princess was fully aware of the propriety of using great circumspection and economy in bestowing these titles of honor, which the Stuarts, who succeeded to her throne, distributed with an imprudent liberality which greatly diminished their value. Blount had no sooner arisen and retired than she turned to the Duchess of Rutland. "Our woman wit," she said, "dear Rutland, is sharper than that of those proud things in doublet and hose. My Lord of Sussex must have lost his own wits, I think, to recommend to us first a madman like Tressilian and then a clownish fool like this other fellow."

The discourse became then more general, and soon after there was a summons to the banquet.

In order to obey this signal, the company were under the necessity of crossing the inner court of the castle, that they might reach the new buildings, containing the large banqueting-room, in which preparations for supper were made upon a scale of profuse magnificence corresponding to the occasion.

It is unnecessary to say anything farther of the festivities of the evening, which were so brilliant in themselves, and received with such obvious and willing satisfaction by the Queen, that Leicester retired to his own apartment with all the giddy raptures of successful ambition. Varney, who had changed his splendid attire, and now waited on his patron in a very modest and plain undress, attended to do the honors of the earl's *coucher*.

"How! Sir Richard," said Leicester, smiling, "your new rank scarce suits the humility of this attendance."

"I am not afraid of men's misconstruction," said Varney in answer to this remark, "since there is not — permit me to undo the collar — a man within the castle who does not expect very soon to see persons of a rank far superior to that which, by

your goodness, I now hold, rendering the duties of the bed-chamber to you, and accounting it an honor."

"It might, indeed, so have been," said the earl, with an involuntary sigh; and then presently added, "My gown, Varney — I will look out on the night. Is not the moon near to the full?"

I think so, my lord, according to the calendar," answered Varney.

There was an abutting window, which opened on a small projecting balcony of stone, battlemented as is usual in Gothic castles. The earl undid the lattice, and stepped out into the open air. He looked up to the blue arch of heaven, with gestures and a countenance expressive of anxious exultation, while Varney, who remained within the darkened apartment, could, himself unnoticed, with a secret satisfaction, see his patron stretch his hands with earnest gesticulation towards the heavenly bodies.

"Ye distant orbs of living fire," so ran the muttered invocation of the ambitious earl, "ye are silent while you wheel your mystic rounds, but Wisdom has given to you a voice. Tell me, then, to what end is my high course destined! Shall the greatness to which I have aspired be bright, pre-eminent, and stable as your own; or am I but doomed to draw a brief and glittering train along the nightly darkness, and then to sink down to earth, like the base refuse of those artificial fires with which men emulate your rays?"

He looked on the heavens in profound silence for a minute or two longer, and then again stepped into the apartment, where Varney seemed to have been engaged in putting the earl's jewels into a casket.

"Lend me your hand, Sir Richard, to doff my gown; and remain an instant, if it is not too burdensome to your knight-hood, while I compose myself to sleep. I believe the bustle of this day has fevered my blood, for it streams through my veins

like a current of molten lead — remain an instant, I pray you; I would fain feel my eyes heavy ere I closed them."

Varney officiously assisted his lord to bed, and placed a massive silver night lamp, with a short sword, on a marble table which stood close by the head of the couch. Either in order to avoid the light of the lamp or to hide his countenance from Varney, Leicester drew the curtain, heavy with entwined silk and gold, so as completely to shade his face. Varney took a seat near the bed, but with his back towards his master, as if to intimate that he was not watching him, and quietly waited till Leicester himself led the way to the topic by which his mind was engrossed.

"And so, Varney," said the earl, after waiting in vain till his dependant should commence the conversation, "men talk of the Queen's favor towards me?"

"Ay, my good lord," said Varney; "of what can they else, since it is so strongly manifested?"

"She is indeed my good and gracious mistress," said Leicester, after another pause; "but it is written, 'Put not thy trust in princes.'"

"A good sentence and a true," said Varney, "unless you can unite their interest with yours so absolutely that they must needs sit on your wrist like hooded hawks."

"I know what thou meanest," said Leicester, impatiently. "Thou wouldst intimate, I might marry the Queen if I would?"

"My lord, it is the thought of ninety-nine out of an hundred men throughout broad England."

"Ay, but," said Leicester, turning himself in his bed, "the hundredth man knows better. Thou, for example, knowest the obstacle that cannot be overleaped."

"I know not that, my lord," said Varney; "the countess is indisposed."

"Villain!" said Leicester, starting up on his couch, and seiz-

ing the sword which lay on the table beside him, "go thy thoughts that way? Thou wouldst not do murder!"

"For whom or what do you hold me, my lord?" said Varney, assuming the superiority of an innocent man subjected to unjust suspicion. "I said nothing to deserve such a horrid imputation as your violence infers. I said but that the countess was ill. And countess though she be — lovely and beloved as she is, surely your lordship must hold her to be mortal? She may die, and your lordship's hand become once more your own."

"Away! — away!" said Leicester; "let me have no more of this."

"Good-night, my lord," said Varney, seeming to understand this as a command to depart; but Leicester's voice interrupted his purpose.

"Thou'scapest me not thus, sir fool," said he; "I think thy knighthood has addled thy brains. Confess thou hast talked of impossibilities as of things which may come to pass."

"My lord, long live your fair countess," said Varney; "but neither your love nor my good wishes can make her immortal. But God grant she live long to be happy herself, and to render you so! I see not but you may be King of England notwithstanding."

"Nay, now, Varney, thou art stark mad," said Leicester.

"I would I were myself within the same nearness to a good estate of freehold," said Varney. "Have we not known in other countries, how a left-handed marriage might subsist betwixt persons of differing degree? — ay, and be no hindrance to prevent the husband from conjoining himself afterwards with a more suitable partner?"

"I have heard of such things in Germany," said Leicester.

"Ay, and the most learned doctors in foreign universities justify the practice from the Old Testament," said Varney. "And, after all, where is the harm? The beautiful partner whom you have chosen for true love has your secret hours of

relaxation and affection. Her fame is safe; her conscience may slumber securely. You have wealth to provide royally for your issue, should Heaven bless you with offspring. Meanwhile, you may give to Elizabeth ten times the leisure, and ten thousand times the affection, that ever Don Philip of Spain spared to her sister Mary; yet you know how she doted on him though so cold and neglectful. It requires but a close mouth and an open brow, and you keep your Eleanor and your fair Rosamond far enough separate. Leave me to build you a bower to which no jealous queen shall find a clue."

Leicester was silent for a moment, then sighed and said, "It is impossible. Good-night, Sir Richard Varney."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WE are now to return to Mervyn's Bower, the apartment, or rather the prison, of the unfortunate Countess of Leicester, who for some time kept within bounds her uncertainty and her impatience. She was aware that, in the tumult of the day, there might be some delay ere her letter could be safely conveyed to the hands of Leicester, and that some time more might elapse ere he could extricate himself from the necessary attendance on Elizabeth, to come and visit her in her secret bower. "I will not expect him," she said, "till night; he cannot be absent from his royal guest, even to see me. He will, I know, come earlier if it be possible, but I will not expect him before night." And yet all the while she did expect him; and, while she tried to argue herself into a contrary belief, each hasty noise, of the hundred which she heard, sounded like the hurried step of Leicester on the staircase, hasting to fold her in his arms.

The fatigue of body which Amy had lately undergone, with the agitation of mind natural to so cruel a state of uncertainty, began by degrees strongly to affect her nerves, and she almost feared

her total inability to maintain the necessary self-command through the scenes which might lie before her. But, although spoiled by an over-indulgent system of education, Amy had naturally a mind of great power, united with a frame which her share in her father's woodland exercises had rendered uncommonly healthy. She summoned to her aid such mental and bodily resources; and not unconscious how much the issue of her fate might depend on her own self-possession, she prayed internally for strength of body and for mental fortitude, and resolved, at the same time, to yield to no nervous impulse which might weaken either.

Yet, when the great bell of the castle, which was placed in Cæsar's Tower, at no great distance from that called Mervyn's, began to send its pealing clamor abroad, in signal of the arrival of the royal procession, the din was so painfully acute to ears rendered nervously sensitive by anxiety, that she could hardly forbear shrieking with anguish in answer to every stunning clash of the relentless peal.

Shortly afterwards, when the small apartment was at once enlightened by the shower of artificial fires with which the air was suddenly filled, and which crossed each other like fiery spirits, the countess felt at first as if each rocket shot close by her eyes, and discharged its sparks and flashes so nigh that she could feel a sense of the heat. But she struggled against these fantastic terrors, and compelled herself to arise, stand by the window, look out, and gaze upon a sight which at another time would have appeared to her at once captivating and fearful. The magnificent towers of the castle were enveloped in garlands of artificial fire, or shrouded with tiaras of pale smoke. The surface of the lake glowed like molten iron, while many fireworks (then thought extremely wonderful, though now common), whose flame continued to exist in the opposing element, dived and rose, hissed and roared, and spouted fire, like so many dragons of enchantment sporting upon a burning lake.

Even Amy was for a moment interested by what was to her so new a scene. "I had thought it magical art," she said, "but poor Tressilian taught me to judge of such things as they are. Great God! and may not these idle splendors resemble my own hoped-for happiness — a single spark, which is instantly swallowed up by surrounding darkness — a precarious glow, which rises but for a brief space into the air, that its fall may be the lower? O Leicester! after all — all that thou hast said — hast sworn — that Amy was thy love, thy life, can it be that thou art the magician at whose nod these enchantments arise, and that she sees them as an outcast, if not a captive?"

The sustained, prolonged, and repeated bursts of music from so many different quarters, and at so many varying points of distance, carried the same oppressive thought still closer to her heart, while some notes would melt in distant and falling tones, as if in compassion for her sorrows, and some burst close and near upon her, as if mocking her misery.

By degrees the sounds of revelry died away, and the countess withdrew from the window at which she had sate listening to them. It was night, but the moon afforded considerable light in the room, so that Amy was able to make the arrangement which she judged necessary. There was hope that Leicester might come to her apartment as soon as the revel in the castle had subsided; but there was also risk she might be disturbed by some unauthorized intruder. She had lost confidence in the key, since Tressilian had entered so easily, though the door was locked on the inside; yet all the additional security she could think of was to place the table across the door, that she might be warned by the noise, should any one attempt to enter. Having taken these necessary precautions, the unfortunate lady withdrew to her couch, stretched herself down on it, mused in anxious expectation, and counted more than one hour after midnight, till exhausted nature proved too strong for love, for grief, for fear, nay, even for uncertainty, and she slept.

The countess dreamed that she was in the ancient house at Cumnor Place, listening for the low whistle with which Leicester often used to announce his presence in the courtyard, when arriving suddenly on one of his stolen visits. But on this occasion, instead of a whistle, she heard the peculiar blast of a bugle-horn, such as her father used to wind on the fall of the stag, and which huntsmen then called a "mort." She ran, as she thought, to a window that looked into the courtyard, which she saw filled with men in mourning garments. The old curate seemed about to read the funeral service. Mumblazen, tricked out in an antique dress, like an ancient herald, held aloft a scutcheon, with its usual decorations of skulls, cross-bones, and hour-glasses, surrounding a coat of arms, of which she could only distinguish that it was surmounted with an earl's coronet. The old man looked at her with a ghastly smile, and said, "Amy, are they not rightly quartered?" Just as he spoke, the horns again poured on her ear the melancholy yet wild strain of the mort, or death-note, and she awoke.

The countess awoke to hear a real bugle-note, or rather the combined breath of many bugles, sounding not the mort, but the jolly reveille, to remind the inmates of the Castle of Kenilworth that the pleasures of the day were to commence with a magnificent stag-hunting in the neighboring chase. Amy started up from her couch, listened to the sound, saw the first beams of the summer morning already twinkle through the lattice of her window, and recollected, with feelings of giddy agony, where she was, and how circumstanced.

"He thinks not of *me*," she said — "he will not come nigh me! A queen is his guest, and what cares he in what corner of his huge castle a wretch like me pines in doubt, which is fast fading into despair?" At once a sound at the door, as of some one attempting to open it softly, filled her with an ineffable mixture of joy and fear; and, hastening to remove the obstacle she had placed against the door, and to unlock it, she had the precaution to ask, "Is it thou, my love?"

"Yes, my countess," murmured a whisper in reply.

She threw open the door, and exclaiming, "Leicester!" flung her arms around the neck of the man who stood without, muffled in his cloak.

"No — not quite Leicester," answered Michael Lambourne, for he it was, returning the caress with vehemence — "not quite Leicester, my lovely and most loving duchess, but as good a man."

With an exertion of force of which she would at another time have thought herself incapable, the countess freed herself from the profane and profaning grasp of the drunken debauchee, and retreated into the midst of her apartment, where despair gave her courage to make a stand.

Lambourne flung the door behind him as he entered, and seized her by the arm, while, incapable of defense, she uttered shriek upon shriek.

The cries of the countess brought unexpected aid, in the person of Laurence Staples, who entered in good time to save her. Laurence was drunk also from the debauch of the preceding night; but fortunately his intoxication had taken a different turn from that of Lambourne.

"Good sir — worthy sir," said the countess, addressing the jailor, "do but save me from him, for the sake of mercy!"

"She speaks fairly," said the jailor, "and I will take her part. So, let go the woman, or I'll knock your brains out with my keys."

"I'll make a blood-pudding of thy midriff first," answered Lambourne, laying his left hand on his dagger, but still detaining the countess by the arm with his right. "So have at thee, thou old ostrich, whose only living is upon a bunch of iron keys!"

Laurence raised the arm of Michael, and prevented him from drawing his dagger; and as Lambourne struggled and strove to shake him off, the countess made a sudden exertion on her side, and, escaping from the apartment, ran downstairs; while, at the

same moment, she heard the two combatants fall on the floor with a noise which increased her terror. The outer wicket offered no impediment to her flight, having been opened for Lambourne's admittance; so that she succeeded in escaping down the stair, and fled into the Pleasance, which seemed to her hasty glance the direction in which she was most likely to avoid pursuit. She had seen this richly ornamented space of ground from the window of Mervyn's Tower; and it occurred to her, at the moment of her escape, that, among its numerous arbors, bowers, fountains, statues, and grottos, she might find some recess, in which she could lie concealed until she had an opportunity of addressing herself to a protector.

"If I could see my guide," she thought, "I would learn if he had delivered my letter. Even did I but see Tressilian, it were better to risk Dudley's anger, by confiding my whole situation to one who is the very soul of honor, than to run the hazard of further insult among the insolent menials of this ill-ruled place. I will not again venture into an inclosed apartment. I will wait — I will watch; amidst so many human beings, there must be some kind heart which can judge and compassionate what mine endures."

In truth, more than one party entered and traversed the Pleasance. But they were in joyous groups of four or five persons together, laughing and jesting in their own fulness of mirth and lightness of heart.

The retreat which she had chosen gave her the easy alternative of avoiding observation. It was but stepping back to the farthest recess of a grotto, ornamented with rustic work and moss-seats, and terminated by a fountain, and she might easily remain concealed, or at her pleasure discover herself to any solitary wanderer whose curiosity might lead him to that romantic retirement. Anticipating such an opportunity, she looked into the clear basin which the silent fountain held up to her like a mirror, and felt shocked at her own appearance, and doubtful

at the same time, muffled and disfigured as her disguise made her seem to herself, whether any female (and it was from the compassion of her own sex that she chiefly expected sympathy) would engage in conference with so suspicious an object. Reasoning thus like a woman, to whom external appearance is scarcely in any circumstances a matter of unimportance, and like a beauty, who had some confidence in the power of her own charms, she laid aside her traveling-cloak, and placed it beside her, so that she could assume it in an instant, ere one could penetrate from the entrance of the grotto to its extremity. The dress which she wore under these vestments was somewhat of a theatrical cast, so as to suit the assumed personage of one of the females who was to act in the pageant. Wayland had found the means of arranging it thus upon the second day of their journey, having experienced the service arising from the assumption of such a character on the preceding day. The fountain, acting both as a mirror and ewer, afforded Amy the means of a brief toilette, of which she availed herself as hastily as possible; then took in her hand her small casket of jewels, in case she might find them useful intercessors, and retiring to the darkest and most sequestered nook, sat down on a seat of moss, and awaited till fate should give her some chance of rescue or of propitiating an intercessor

CHAPTER XXX.

It chanced, upon that memorable morning, that one of the earliest of the huntress train who appeared from her chamber in full array for the chase was the princess for whom all these pleasures were instituted, England's Maiden Queen. I know not if it were by chance, or out of the befitting courtesy due to a mistress by whom he was so much honored, that she had scarcely made one step beyond the threshold of her chamber ere Leicester was by her side, and proposed to her, until the preparations for the

chase had been completed, to view the Pleasance and the gardens which it connected with the castle yard.

To this new scene of pleasures they walked, the earl's arm affording his sovereign the occasional support which she required, where flights of steps, then a favorite ornament in a garden, conducted them from terrace to terrace and from parterre to parterre. The ladies in attendance, gifted with prudence, or endowed perhaps with the amiable desire of acting as they would be done by, did not conceive their duty to the Queen's person required them, though they lost not sight of her, to approach so near as to share, or perhaps disturb, the conversation betwixt the Queen and the earl, who was not only her host, but also her most trusted, esteemed, and favored servant. They contented themselves with admiring the grace of this illustrious couple, whose robes of state were now exchanged for hunting-suits, almost equally magnificent.

The conversation of Elizabeth and the favorite earl has not reached us in detail. But those who watched at some distance were of opinion that on no occasion did the dignity of Elizabeth, in gesture and motion, seem so decidedly to soften away into a mien expressive of indecision and tenderness.

Horses in the meanwhile neighed and champed the bits with impatience in the base court; hounds yelled in their couples, and yeomen and rangers lamented the exhaling of the dew, which would prevent the scent from lying. But Leicester had another chase in view. The Queen had probably listened with more than usual favor to that mixture of romantic gallantry with which she always loved to be addressed; and the earl had, in vanity, in ambition, or in both, thrown in more and more of that delicious ingredient, until his importunity became the language of love itself.

"No, Dudley," said Elizabeth, yet it was with broken accents — "no, I must be the mother of my people. Other ties, that make the lowly maiden happy, are denied to her sovereign. No, Leicester, urge it no more. Were I as others, free to seek my

own happiness, then, indeed — but it cannot — cannot be. Delay the chase — delay it for half an hour — and leave me, my lord.”

“How, leave you, madam!” said Leicester. “Has my madness offended you?”

“No, Leicester, not so!” answered the Queen, hastily; “but it is madness, and must not be repeated. Go, but go not far from hence; and meantime let no one intrude on my privacy.”

While she spoke thus, Dudley bowed deeply, and retired with a slow and melancholy air. The Queen stood gazing after him, and murmured to herself — “Were it possible — were it *but* possible! But no — no; Elizabeth must be the wife and mother of England alone.”

As she spoke thus, and in order to avoid some one whose step she heard approaching, the Queen turned into the grotto in which her hapless, and yet but too successful, rival lay concealed.

The mind of England’s Elizabeth, if somewhat shaken by the agitating interview to which she had just put a period, was of that firm and decided character which soon recovers its natural tone. As she advanced with a slow pace towards the inmost extremity of the grotto, her countenance, ere she had proceeded half the length, had recovered its dignity of look and her mien its air of command.

It was then the Queen became aware that a female figure was placed beside, or rather partly behind, an alabaster column, at the foot of which arose the pellucid fountain, which occupied the inmost recess of the twilight grotto. As she advanced, she became doubtful whether she beheld a statue or a form of flesh and blood. The unfortunate Amy, indeed, remained motionless, betwixt the desire which she had to make her condition known to one of her own sex and her awe for the stately form which approached her, and which, though her eyes had never before beheld, her fears instantly suspected to be the personage she really was. Amy had arisen from her seat with the purpose of

addressing the lady who entered the grotto alone, and, as she at first thought, so opportunely. But when she recollected the alarm which Leicester had expressed at the Queen's knowing aught of their union, and became more and more satisfied that the person whom she now beheld was Elizabeth herself, she stood with one foot advanced and one withdrawn, her arms, head, and hands perfectly motionless, and her cheek as pallid as the alabaster pedestal against which she leaned. Her dress was of pale sea-green silk, little distinguished in that imperfect light, and somewhat resembled the drapery of a Grecian nymph.

Elizabeth remained in doubt, even after she had approached within a few paces, whether she did not gaze on a statue so cunningly fashioned that by the doubtful light it could not be distinguished from reality. She stopped, therefore, and fixed upon this interesting object her princely look with so much keenness that the astonishment which had kept Amy immovable gave way to awe, and she gradually cast down her eyes and drooped her head under the commanding gaze of the sovereign. Still, however, she remained in all respects, saving this slow and profound inclination of the head, motionless and silent.

From her dress, and the casket which she instinctively held in her hand, Elizabeth naturally conjectured that the beautiful but mute figure which she beheld was a performer in one of the various theatrical pageants which had been placed in different situations to surprise her with their homage, and that the poor player, overcome with awe at her presence, had either forgot the part assigned her or lacked courage to go through it. It was natural and courteous to give her some encouragement; and Elizabeth accordingly said, in a tone of condescending kindness, "How now, fair nymph of this lovely grotto, art thou spellbound and struck with dumbness by the charms of the wicked enchanter whom men term fear? We are his sworn enemy, maiden, and can reverse his charm. Speak, we command thee."

Instead of answering her by speech, the unfortunate countess

dropped on her knee before the Queen, let her casket fall from her hand, and clasping her palms together, looked up in the Queen's face with such a mixed agony of fear and supplication that Elizabeth was considerably affected.

"What may this mean?" she said; "this is a stronger passion than befits the occasion. Stand up, damsel; what wouldst thou have with us?"

"Your protection, madam," faltered forth the unhappy petitioner.

"Each daughter of England has it while she is worthy of it," replied the Queen. "Why, and in what, do you crave our protection?"

Amy hastily endeavored to recall what she were best to say, which might secure herself from the imminent dangers that surrounded her, without endangering her husband; and plunging from one thought to another, amidst the chaos which filled her mind, she could at length, in answer to the Queen's repeated inquiries in what she sought protection, only falter out, "Alas! I know not."

"This is folly, maiden," said Elizabeth, impatiently; for there was something in the extreme confusion of the suppliant which irritated her curiosity, as well as interested her feelings. "The sick man must tell his malady to the physician, nor are *we* accustomed to ask questions so oft without receiving an answer."

"I request — I implore," stammered forth the unfortunate countess — "I beseech your gracious protection — against — against one Varney." She choked wellnigh as she uttered the fatal word, which was instantly caught up by the Queen.

"What Varney? Sir Richard Varney — the servant of Lord Leicester? What, damsel, are you to him, or he to you?"

"I — I — was his prisoner — and he practiced on my life — and I broke forth to — to ——"

"To throw thyself on my protection, doubtless," said Elizabeth. "Thou shalt have it — that is, if thou art worthy; for we

will sift this matter to the uttermost. Thou art," she said, bending on the countess an eye which seemed designed to pierce her very inmost soul — "thou art Amy, daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart of Lidcote Hall?"

"Forgive me — forgive me, most gracious princess!" said Amy, dropping once more on her knee, from which she had arisen.

"For what should I forgive thee, silly wench?" said Elizabeth; "for being the daughter of thine own father? Thou art brain-sick, surely. Well, I see I must wring the story from thee by inches. Thou didst deceive thine old and honored father — thy look confesses it; cheated Master Tressilian — thy blush avouches it; and married this same Varney?"

Amy sprung on her feet, and interrupted the Queen eagerly, with, "No, madam — no; I am not the wife of that contemptible slave — of that most deliberate villain! I am not the wife of Varney! I would rather be the bride of destruction!"

The Queen, overwhelmed in her turn by Amy's vehemence, stood silent for an instant, and then replied, "Why, God ha' mercy, woman! I see thou canst talk fast enough when the theme likes thee. Nay, tell me, woman," she continued, for to the impulse of curiosity was now added that of an undefined jealousy that some deception had been practiced on her — "tell me, woman — for, by God's day, I WILL know — whose wife art thou? Speak out, and be speedy. Thou wert better dally with a lioness than with Elizabeth."

Urged to this extremity, dragged as it were by irresistible force to the verge of the precipice, which she saw but could not avoid, permitted not a moment's respite by the eager words and menacing gestures of the offended Queen, Amy at length uttered in despair, "The Earl of Leicester knows it all."

"The Earl of Leicester," said Elizabeth, in utter astonishment. "The Earl of Leicester!" she repeated, with kindling anger. "Woman, thou art set on to this — thou dost belie him;

he takes no keep of such things as thou art. Thou art suborned to slander the noblest lord and the truest-hearted gentleman in England! But were he the right hand of our trust, or something yet dearer to us, thou shalt have thy hearing, and that in his presence. Come with me — come with me instantly!"

As Amy shrunk back with terror, which the incensed Queen interpreted as that of conscious guilt, Elizabeth rapidly advanced, seized on her arm, and hastened with swift and long steps out of the grotto, and along the principal alley of the Pleasance, dragging with her the terrified countess.

Leicester was at this moment the center of a splendid group of lords and ladies, assembled together under an arcade, or portico, which closed the alley. The company had drawn together in that place to attend the commands of her Majesty when the hunting-party should go forward, and their astonishment may be imagined when, instead of seeing Elizabeth advance towards them with her usual measured dignity of motion, they beheld her walking so rapidly that she was in the midst of them ere they were aware; and then observed, with fear and surprise, that her features were flushed betwixt anger and agitation, that her hair was loosened by her haste of motion, and that her eyes sparkled as they were wont when the spirit of Henry VIII. mounted highest in his daughter. Nor were they less astonished at the appearance of the pale, extenuated, half-dead, yet still lovely, female whom the Queen upheld by main strength with one hand, while with the other she waved aside the ladies and nobles who pressed towards her, under the idea that she was taken suddenly ill. "Where is my Lord of Leicester?" she said, in a tone that thrilled with astonishment all the courtiers who stood around. "Stand forth, my Lord of Leicester!"

If, in the midst of the most serene day of summer, when all is light and laughing around, a thunderbolt were to fall from the clear blue vault of heaven, and rend the earth at the very feet of some careless traveler, he could not gaze upon the smouldering

chasm with half the astonishment and fear which Leicester felt at the sight that so suddenly presented itself. He had that instant been receiving, with a political affectation of disavowing and misunderstanding their meaning, the half-uttered, half-intimated congratulations of the courtiers upon the favor of the Queen. And now, while the subdued yet proud smile with which he disclaimed those inferences was yet curling his cheek, the Queen shot into the circle, her passions excited to the uttermost; and, supporting with one hand, the pale and sinking form of his almost expiring wife, and pointing with the finger of the other to her half-dead features, demanded in a voice that sounded to the ears of the astounded statesman like the last dread trumpet-call, that is to summon body and spirit to the judgment-seat, "Knowest thou this woman?"

As, at the blast of that last trumpet, the guilty shall call upon the mountains to cover them, Leicester's inward thoughts invoked the stately arch which he had built in his pride to burst its strong conjunction and overwhelm them in its ruins. But the cemented stones, architrave, and battlement, stood fast; and it was the proud master himself who, as if some actual pressure had bent him to the earth, kneeled down before Elizabeth, and prostrated his brow to the marble flagstones on which she stood.

"Leicester," said Elizabeth, in a voice which trembled with passion, "could I think thou hast practiced on me — on me thy sovereign — the base and ungrateful deception which thy present confusion surmises — by all that is holy, false lord, that head of thine were in as great peril as ever was thy father's!"

Leicester had not conscious innocence, but he had pride, to support him. He raised slowly his brow and features, which were black and swollen with contending emotions, and only replied, "My head cannot fall but by the sentence of my peers; to them I will plead, and not to a princess who thus requites my faithful service!"

"What! my lords," said Elizabeth, looking around, "we are

defied, I think — defied in the castle we have ourselves bestowed on this proud man! My Lord Shrewsbury, you are marshal of England; attach him of high treason!”

“Whom does your Grace mean?” said Shrewsbury, much surprised, for he had that instant joined the astonished circle.

“Whom should I mean but that traitor, Dudley Earl of Leicester! Cousin of Hunsdon, order out your band of gentlemen pensioners, and take him into instant custody. I say, villain, make haste!”

Hunsdon, a rough old noble, who, from his relationship to the Boleyns, was accustomed to use more freedom with the Queen than almost any other dared to do, replied bluntly, “And it is like your Grace might order me to the Tower to-morrow for making too much haste. I do beseech you to be patient.”

“Patient! God’s life!” exclaimed the Queen, “name not the word to me; thou know’st not of what he is guilty!”

Amy, who had by this time in some degree recovered herself, and who saw her husband, as she conceived, in the utmost danger from the rage of an offended sovereign, instantly forgot her own wrongs and her own danger in her apprehensions for him, and throwing herself before the Queen, embraced her knees, while she exclaimed, “He is guiltless, madam — he is guiltless; no one can lay aught to the charge of the noble Leicester!”

“Why, minion,” answered the Queen, “didst not thou thyself say the Earl of Leicester was privy to thy whole history?”

“Did I say so?” repeated the unhappy Amy, laying aside every consideration of consistency and of self-interest; “Oh, if I did, I foully belied him. May God so judge me, as I believe he was never privy to a thought that would harm me!”

“Woman!” said Elizabeth, “I will know who has moved thee to this; or my wrath — and the wrath of kings is a flaming fire — shall wither and consume thee like a weed in the furnace.”

As the Queen uttered this threat, Leicester's better angel called his pride to his aid, and reproached him with the utter extremity of meanness which would overwhelm him for ever if he stooped to take shelter under the generous interposition of his wife, and abandoned her, in return for her kindness, to the resentment of the Queen. He had already raised his head, with the dignity of a man of honor, to avow his marriage, and proclaim himself the protector of his countess, when Varney, born, as it appeared, to be his master's evil genius, rushed into the presence, with every mark of disorder on his face and apparel.

"What means this saucy intrusion?" said Elizabeth.

Varney, with the air of a man altogether overwhelmed with grief and confusion, prostrated himself before her feet, exclaiming, "Pardon, my liege — pardon! or at least let your justice avenge itself on me, where it is due; but spare my noble, my generous, my innocent patron and master!"

Amy, who was yet kneeling, started up as she saw the man whom she deemed most odious place himself so near her, and was about to fly towards Leicester, when, checked at once by the uncertainty and even timidity which his looks had reassumed as soon as the appearance of his confidant seemed to open a new scene, she hung back, and, uttering a faint scream, besought of her Majesty to cause her to be imprisoned in the lowest dungeon of the castle — "but spare," she exclaimed, "my sight and hearing — the sight of that unutterable and most shameless villain!"

"And why, sweetheart?" said the Queen, moved by a new impulse; "what hath he, this false knight, since such thou accountest him, done to thee?"

"Oh, worse than sorrow, madam, and worse than injury: he has sown dissension where most there should be peace. I shall go mad if I look longer on him!"

"Beshrew me, but I think thou art distraught already," answered the Queen. "My Lord Hunsdon, look to this poor

distressed young woman, and let her be safely bestowed and in honest keeping till we require her to be forthcoming."

"By Our Lady!" said Hunsdon, taking in his strong, sinewy arms the fading and almost swooning form of Amy, "she is a lovely child; and though a rough nurse, your Grace hath given her a kind one. She is safe with me as one of my own lady-birds of daughters."

So saying, he carried her off, unresistingly and almost unconsciously; his war-worn locks and long gray beard mingling with her light-brown tresses, as her head reclined on his strong square shoulder. The Queen followed him with her eye; she had already, with that self-command which forms so necessary a part of a sovereign's accomplishments, suppressed every appearance of agitation, and seemed as if she desired to banish all traces of her burst of passion from the recollection of those who had witnessed it. "My Lord of Hunsdon says well," she observed; "he is indeed but a rough nurse for so tender a babe."

As she made this observation, she smiled graciously, and stole her eyes almost insensibly round to seek those of the Earl of Leicester, to whom she now began to think she had spoken with hasty harshness upon the unfounded suspicion of a moment.

The Queen's eye found the earl in no mood to accept the implied offer of conciliation. His own looks had followed, with late and rueful repentance, the faded form which Hunsdon had just borne from the presence; they now reposed gloomily on the ground, but more — so at least it seemed to Elizabeth — with the expression of one who has received an unjust affront than of him who is conscious of guilt. She turned her face angrily from him, and said to Varney, "Speak, Sir Richard, and explain these riddles; thou hast sense and the use of speech, at least, which elsewhere we look for in vain."

"Your Majesty's piercing eye," answered Varney, "has already detected the cruel malady of my beloved lady; which, unhappy that I am, I would not suffer to be expressed in the

certificate of her physician, seeking to conceal what has now broken out with so much the more scandal."

"She is then distraught?" said the Queen; "indeed, we doubted not of it: her whole demeanor bears it out. I found her moping in a corner of yonder grotto; and every word she spoke — which indeed I dragged from her as by the rack — she instantly recalled and forswore. But how came she hither? Why had you her not in safe keeping?"

"My gracious liege," said Varney, "the worthy gentleman under whose charge I left her, Master Anthony Foster, has come hither but now, as fast as man and horse can travel, to show me of her escape, which she managed with the art peculiar to many who are afflicted with this malady. He is at hand for examination."

"Let it be for another time," said the Queen. "But, Sir Richard, we envy you not your domestic felicity; your lady railed on you bitterly, and seemed ready to swoon at beholding you."

"It is the nature of persons in her disorder, so please your Grace," answered Varney, "to be ever most inveterate in their spleen against those whom, in their better moments, they hold nearest and dearest."

"We have heard so, indeed," said Elizabeth, "and give faith to the saying."

"May your Grace then be pleased," said Varney, "to command my unfortunate wife to be delivered into the custody of her friends?"

Leicester partly started; but, making a strong effort, he subdued his emotion, while Elizabeth answered sharply, "You are something too hasty, Master Varney; we will have first a report of the lady's health and state of mind from Masters, our own physician, and then determine what shall be thought just. You shall have license, however, to see her, that, if there be any matrimonial quarrel betwixt you — such things we have heard do occur, even

betwixt a loving couple — you may make it up, without further scandal to our court or trouble to ourselves.”

Varney bowed low, and made no other answer.

Elizabeth again looked towards Leicester, and said, with a degree of condescension which could only arise out of the most heartfelt interest, “ My Lord of Leicester, you are offended with us, and we have right to be offended with you. We will take the lion’s part upon us, and be the first to forgive.”

Leicester smoothed his brow, as by an effort, but the trouble was too deep-seated that its placidity should at once return. He said, however, that which fitted the occasion, “ That he could not have the happiness of forgiving, because she who commanded him to do so could commit no injury towards him.”

Elizabeth seemed content with this reply, and intimated her pleasure that the sports of the morning should proceed. The bugles sounded — the hounds bayed — the horses pranced; but the courtiers and ladies sought the amusement to which they were summoned with hearts very different from those which had leaped to the morning’s reveille. There was doubt, and fear, and expectation on every brow, and surmise and intrigue in every whisper.

CHAPTER XXXI.

It was not till after a long and successful morning’s sport, and a prolonged repast which followed the return of the Queen to the castle, that Leicester at length found himself alone with Varney, from whom he now learned the whole particulars of the countess’s escape, as they had been brought to Kenilworth by Foster, who, in his terror for the consequences, had himself posted thither with the tidings. As Varney, in his narrative, took especial care to be silent concerning those practices on the countess’s health which had driven her to so desperate a resolution, Leicester, who could only suppose that she had adopted it

out of jealous impatience to attain the avowed state and appearance belonging to her rank, was not a little offended at the levity with which his wife had broken his strict commands, and exposed him to the resentment of Elizabeth.

"I have given," he said, "to this daughter of an obscure Devonshire gentleman the proudest name in England. I have made her sharer of my bed and of my fortunes. I ask but of her a little patience, ere she launches forth upon the full current of her grandeur, and the infatuated woman will rather hazard her own shipwreck and mine, than tarry for a little space longer in the obscurity to which she was born. So lovely, so delicate, so fond, so faithful, yet to lack in so grave a matter the prudence which one might hope from the veriest fool — it puts me beyond my patience."

"We may post it over yet well enough," said Varney, "if my lady will but be ruled, and take on her the character which the time commands."

"It is but too true, Sir Richard," said Leicester, "there is indeed no other remedy. I have heard her termed thy wife in my presence, without contradiction. She must bear the title until she is far from Kenilworth."

"And long afterwards, I trust," said Varney; then instantly added, "For I cannot but hope it will be long after ere she bear the title of Lady Leicester: I fear me it may scarce be with safety during the life of this Queen."

"You are right, Varney," said Leicester; "we have once this day stood upon terms little short of defiance; and to those, I fear, we must again return."

"Is her resentment, then, so implacable?" said Varney.

"Far from it," replied the earl; "for, being what she is in spirit and in station, she has even this day been but too condescending, in giving me opportunities to repair what she thinks my faulty heat of temper."

"Ay," answered Varney; "the Italians say right: in lovers'

quarrels the party that loves most is always most willing to acknowledge the greater fault. So then, my lord, if this union with the lady could be concealed, you stand with Elizabeth as you did ? ”

Leicester sighed, and was silent for a moment, ere he replied.

“ Varney, I think thou art true to me, and I will tell thee all. I do *not* stand where I did. I have spoken to Elizabeth — under what mad impulse I know not — on a theme which cannot be abandoned without touching every female feeling to the quick, and which yet I dare not and cannot prosecute. She can never, never forgive me for having caused and witnessed those yieldings to human passion. ”

“ We must do something, my lord, ” said Varney, “ and that speedily. ”

“ There is nought to be done, ” answered Leicester, despondingly.

“ Think better of your situation, my lord, ” said Varney; “ let us try the experiment in which you have but now acquiesced. Keep we your marriage from Elizabeth’s knowledge, and all may yet be well. I will instantly go to the lady myself. She hates me, because I have been earnest with your lordship, as she truly suspects, in opposition to what she terms her rights. I care not for her prejudices. She *shall* listen to me; and I will show her such reasons for yielding to the pressure of the times, that I doubt not to bring back her consent to whatever measures these exigencies may require. ”

“ No, Varney, ” said Leicester; “ I have thought upon what is to be done, and I will myself speak with Amy. ”

It was now Varney’s turn to feel, upon his own account, the terrors which he affected to participate solely on account of his patron. “ Your lordship will not yourself speak with the lady ? ”

“ It is my fixed purpose, ” said Leicester; “ fetch me one of the livery cloaks; I will pass the sentinel as thy servant. Thou art to have free access to her. ”

"But, my lord ——"

"I will have no 'buts,' " said Leicester; "it shall be even thus, and not otherwise. Hunsdon sleeps, I think, in Saintlowe's Tower. We can go thither from these apartments by the private passage, without risk of meeting any one. Or what if I do meet Hunsdon? he is more my friend than enemy, and thick-witted enough to adopt any belief that is thrust on him. Fetch me the cloak instantly."

Varney had no alternative save obedience. In a few minutes Leicester was muffled in the mantle, pulled his bonnet over his brows, and followed Varney along the secret passage of the castle which communicated with Hunsdon's apartments. They emerged at a door where Lord Hunsdon had, with military precaution, placed a sentinel, one of his own northern retainers as it fortune'd, who readily admitted Sir Richard Varney and his attendant, saying only, in his northern dialect, "I would, man, thou couldst make the mad lady be still yonder; for her moans do so thrill through my head that I would rather keep watch on a snowdrift in the wastes of Catlowdie."

They hastily entered, and shut the door behind them.

The Countess Amy, with her hair and her garments dishevelled, was seated upon a sort of couch, in an attitude of the deepest affliction, out of which she was startled by the opening of the door. She turned hastily round, and, fixing her eye on Varney, exclaimed, "Wretch! art thou come to frame some new plan of villainy?"

Leicester cut short her reproaches by stepping forward and dropping his cloak, while he said, in a voice rather of authority than of affection, "It is with me, madam, you have to commune, not with Sir Richard Varney."

The change effected on the countess's look and manner was like magic. "Dudley!" she exclaimed — "Dudley! and art thou come at last?" And with the speed of lightning she flew to her husband, clung around his neck, and, unheeding the

presence of Varney, overwhelmed him with caresses, while she bathed his face in a flood of tears; muttering, at the same time, but in broken and disjointed monosyllables, the fondest expressions which love teaches his votaries.

Leicester, as it seemed to him, had reason to be angry with his lady for transgressing his commands, and thus placing him in the perilous situation in which he had that morning stood. But what displeasure could keep its ground before these testimonies of affection from a being so lovely that even the negligence of dress, and the withering effects of fear, grief, and fatigue, which would have impaired the beauty of others, rendered hers but the more interesting! He received and repaid her caresses with fondness, mingled with melancholy, the last of which she seemed scarcely to observe, until the first transport of her own joy was over; when, looking anxiously in his face, she asked if he was ill.

"Not in my body, Amy," was his answer.

"Then I will be well too. O Dudley! I have been ill! — very ill, since we last met! — for I call not this morning's horrible vision a meeting. I have been in sickness, in grief, and in danger. But thou art come, and all is joy, and health, and safety!"

"Alas! Amy," said Leicester, "thou hast undone me!"

"I, my lord!" said Amy, her cheek at once losing its transient flush of joy; "how could I injure that which I love better than myself?"

"I would not upbraid you, Amy," replied the earl; "but are you not here contrary to my express commands; and does not your presence here endanger both yourself and me?"

"Does it — does it indeed?" she exclaimed, eagerly; "then why am I here a moment longer? Oh, if you knew by what fears I was urged to quit Cumnor Place! But I will say nothing of myself, only that, if it might be otherwise, I would not willingly return *thither*; yet if it concern your safety ——"

"We will think, Amy, of some other retreat," said Leicester;

"and you shall go to one of my northern castles, under the personage — it will be but needful, I trust, for a very few days — of Varney's wife."

"How, my Lord of Leicester!" said the lady, disengaging herself from his embraces; "is it to your wife you give the dishonorable counsel to acknowledge herself the bride of another — and of all men, the bride of that Varney?"

"Madam, I speak it in earnest. Varney is my true and faithful servant, trusted in my deepest secrets. I had better lose my right hand than his service at this moment. You have no cause to scorn him as you do."

"I could assign one, my lord," replied the countess; "and I see he shakes even under that assured look of his. But he that is necessary as your right hand to your safety is free from any accusation of mine. May he be true to you; and that he may be true, trust him not too much or too far. But it is enough to say, that I will not go with him unless by violence, nor would I acknowledge him as my husband were all ——"

"It is a temporary deception, madam," said Leicester, irritated by her opposition. "There is no other remedy: you must do what your own impatient folly hath rendered necessary — I command you."

"I cannot put your commands, my lord," said Amy, "in balance with those of honor and conscience. I will not, in this instance, obey you. You may achieve your own dishonor, to which these crooked policies naturally tend; but I will do nought that can blemish mine. How could you again, my lord, acknowledge me as a pure and chaste matron, worthy to share your fortunes, when, holding that high character, I had strolled the country the acknowledged wife of such a profligate fellow as your servant Varney?"

"My lord," said Varney, interposing, "my lady is too much prejudiced against me, unhappily, to listen to what I can offer; yet it may please her better than what she proposes. She has

good interest with Master Edmund Tressilian, and could doubtless prevail on him to consent to be her companion to Lidcote Hall, and there she might remain in safety until time permitted the development of this mystery."

Leicester was silent, but stood looking eagerly on Amy, with eyes which seemed suddenly to glow as much with suspicion as displeasure.

The countess only said, "Would to God I were in my father's house! When I left it, I little thought I was leaving peace of mind and honor behind me."

Varney proceeded with a tone of deliberation. "Doubtless this will make it necessary to take strangers into my lord's counsels; but surely the countess will be warrant for the honor of Master Tressilian and such of her father's family——"

"Peace, Varney," said Leicester; "by Heaven I will strike my dagger into thee, if again thou namest Tressilian as a partner of my counsels!"

"And wherefore not?" said the countess; "unless they be counsels fitter for such as Varney than for a man of stainless honor and integrity. My lord—my lord, bend no angry brows on me; it is the truth, and it is I who speak it. I once did Tressilian wrong for your sake; I will not do him the further injustice of being silent when his honor is brought in question. I can forbear," she said, looking at Varney, "to pull the mask off hypocrisy, but I will not permit virtue to be slandered in my hearing."

There was a dead pause. Leicester stood displeased, yet undetermined, and too conscious of the weakness of his cause; while Varney, with a deep and hypocritical affectation of sorrow, mingled with humility, bent his eyes on the ground.

It was then that the Countess Amy displayed, in the midst of distress and difficulty, the natural energy of character which would have rendered her, had fate allowed, a distinguished ornament of the rank which she held. She walked up to Leicester

with a composed step, a dignified air, and looks in which strong affection essayed in vain to shake the firmness of conscious truth and rectitude of principle. "You have spoke your mind, my lord," she said, "in these difficulties, with which, unhappily, I have found myself unable to comply. This gentleman — this person, I would say — has hinted at another scheme, to which I object not but as it displeases you. Will your lordship be pleased to hear what a young and timid woman, but your most affectionate wife, can suggest in the present extremity?"

Leicester was silent, but bent his head towards the countess, as an intimation that she was at liberty to proceed.

"There hath been but one cause for all these evils, my lord," she proceeded, "and it resolves itself into the mysterious duplicity with which you have been induced to surround yourself. Extricate yourself at once, my lord, from the tyranny of these disgraceful trammels. Be like a true English gentleman, knight, and earl, who holds that truth is the foundation of honor, and that honor is dear to him as the breath of his nostrils. Take your ill-fated wife by the hand; lead her to the footstool of Elizabeth's throne; say that, 'In a moment of infatuation, moved by supposed beauty, of which none perhaps can now trace even the remains, I gave my hand to this Amy Robsart.' You will then have done justice to me, my lord, and to your own honor; and should law or power require you to part from me, I will oppose no objection, since I may then with honor hide a grieved and broken heart in those shades from which your love withdrew me. Then — have but a little patience, and Amy's life will not long darken your brighter prospects."

There was so much of dignity, so much of tenderness, in the countess's remonstrance that it moved all that was noble and generous in the soul of her husband. The scales seemed to fall from his eyes, and the duplicity of which he had been guilty stung him at once with remorse and shame.

"I am not worthy of you, Amy," he said, "that could weigh

aught which ambition has to give against such a heart as thine! I have a bitter penance to perform, in disentangling, before sneering foes and astounded friends, all the meshes of my own deceitful policy. And the Queen — but let her take my head, as she has threatened.”

“Your head, my lord!” said the countess; “because you used the freedom and liberty of an English subject in choosing a wife? For shame; is it this distrust of the Queen’s justice, this apprehension of danger, which cannot but be imaginary, that, like scarecrows, have induced you to forsake the straightforward path, which, as it is the best, is also the safest.”

“Ah, Amy, thou little knowest!” said Dudley; but, instantly checking himself, he added, “Yet she shall not find in me a safe or easy victim of arbitrary vengeance. I have friends — I have allies — I will not, like Norfolk, be dragged to the block as a victim to sacrifice. Fear not, Amy; thou shalt see Dudley bear himself worthy of his name. I must instantly communicate with some of those friends on whom I can best rely; for, as things stand, I may be made prisoner in my own castle.”

“O, my good lord,” said Amy, “make no faction in a peaceful state! There is no friend can help us so well as our own candid truth and honor. Truth, my noble lord, is well painted unarmed.”

“But wisdom, Amy,” answered Leicester, “is arrayed in panoply of proof. Argue not with me on the means I shall use to render my confession — since it must be called so — as safe as may be; it will be fraught with enough of danger, do what we will. Varney, we must hence. Farewell, Amy, whom I am to vindicate as mine own at an expense and risk of which thou alone couldst be worthy! You shall soon hear farther from me.”

He embraced her fervently, muffled himself as before, and accompanied Varney from the apartment. The latter, as he left the room, bowed low, and, as he raised his body, regarded Amy with a peculiar expression, as if he desired to know how far his

own pardon was included in the reconciliation which had taken place betwixt her and her lord. The countess looked upon him with a fixed eye, but seemed no more conscious of his presence than if there had been nothing but vacant air on the spot where he stood.

"She has brought me to the crisis," he muttered. "She or I are lost. It is now decided. She or I must perish."

While he thus spoke, he observed, with surprise, that a boy, repulsed by the sentinel, made up to Leicester and spoke with him. He asked the sentinel what the lad wanted with him, and received for answer, that the boy had wished him to transmit a parcel to the mad lady, but that he cared not to take charge of it, such communication being beyond his commission. His curiosity satisfied in that particular, he approached his patron, and heard him say, "Well, boy, the packet shall be delivered."

"Thanks, good Master Serving-man," said the boy, and was out of sight in an instant.

Leicester and Varney returned with hasty steps to the earl's private apartment by the same passage which had conducted them to Saintlowe's Tower.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THEY were no sooner in the earl's cabinet than, taking his tablets from his pocket, he began to write, speaking partly to Varney and partly to himself: "There are many of them close bounden to me, and especially those in good estate and high office. Let me see — Knollis is sure, and through his means Guernsey and Jersey. Horsey commands in the Isle of Wight. My brother-in-law, Huntingdon, and Pembroke have authority in Wales. Through Bedford I lead the Puritans. My brother of Warwick is equal, wellnigh, to myself in wealth, followers, and dependencies. Sir Owen Hopton is at my devotion; he commands the Tower of London, and the national treasure deposited

there. My father and grandfather needed never to have stooped their heads to the block had they thus forecast their enterprises. Why look you so sad, Varney ? ”

“ Alas ! my lord,” said Varney, with well-acted passion, and then resumed the same look of despondency which Leicester had before noted.

“ Alas ! ” repeated Leicester, “ and wherefore alas, Sir Richard ? Doth your new spirit of chivalry supply no more vigorous ejaculation when a noble struggle is impending ? Or, if ‘ alas ’ means thou wilt flinch from the conflict, thou mayst leave the castle, or go join mine enemies, whichever thou thinkest best.”

“ Not so, my lord,” answered his confidant ; “ Varney will be found fighting or dying by your side. Forgive me if, in love to you, I see more fully than your noble heart permits you to do the inextricable difficulties with which you are surrounded. You are strong, my lord, and powerful ; yet, let me say it without offence, you are so only by the reflected light of the Queen’s favor. But let her call back the honors she has bestowed, and the prophet’s gourd did not wither more suddenly. Declare against the Queen, and even in this very castle, and in the midst of your vassals, kinsmen, and dependants, you would be a captive, nay, a sentenced captive, should she please to say the word. Think upon Norfolk, my lord — upon the powerful Northumberland — the splendid Westmoreland — they are dead, captive, or fugitive. This is not like other thrones ; the broad foundations which support it are in the extended love and affections of the people. You might share it with Elizabeth, if you would ; but neither yours nor any other power, foreign or domestic, will avail to overthrow or even to shake it.”

He paused, and Leicester threw his tablets from him with an air of reckless despite. “ It may be as thou say’st. But it shall not be said I fell without a struggle. Give orders that those of my retainers who served under me in Ireland be gradually drawn into the main keep, and let our gentlemen and friends

stand on their guard, and go armed, as if they expected an onset from the followers of Sussex. Possess the townspeople with some apprehension; let them take arms and be ready, at a signal given, to overpower the pensioners and yeomen of the guard."

"Let me remind you, my lord," said Varney, with the same appearance of deep and melancholy interest, "that you have given me orders to prepare for disarming the Queen's guard. It is an act of high treason, but you shall nevertheless be obeyed."

"I care not," said Leicester, desperately — "I care not. Shame is behind me, ruin before me; I must on."

Here there was another pause, which Varney at length broke with the following words — "It is come to the point I have long dreaded. I must either witness, like an ungrateful beast, the downfall of the best and kindest of masters, or I must speak what I would have buried in the deepest oblivion."

"What is that thou sayst, or wouldst say?" replied the earl; "we have no time to waste on words, when the time calls us to action."

"My speech is soon made, my lord — would to God it were as soon answered! Your marriage is the sole cause of the threatened breach with your sovereign, my lord, is it not?"

"Thou knowest it is!" replied Leicester. "What needs so fruitless a question?"

"Pardon me, my lord," said Varney; "the use lies here. Men will wager their lands and lives in defence of a rich diamond, my lord; but were it not first prudent to look if there is no flaw in it?"

"What means this?" said Leicester, with eyes sternly fixed on his dependant; "of whom dost thou dare to speak?"

"It is — of the Countess Amy, my lord, of whom I am unhappily bound to speak; and of whom I *will* speak, were your lordship to kill me for my zeal."

"Thou mayst happen to deserve it at my hand," said the earl; "but speak on, I will hear thee."

"Nay, then, my lord, I will be bold. I like not this lady's tampering and trickstering with this same Edmund Tressilian. You know him, my lord. You know he had formerly an interest in her, which it cost your lordship some pains to supersede. You know the eagerness with which he has pressed on the suit against me in behalf of this lady, the open object of which is to drive your lordship to an avowal of what I must ever call your most unhappy marriage, the point to which my lady also is willing, at any risk, to urge you."

Leicester smiled constrainedly. "Thou meanest well, good Sir Richard, and wouldst, I think, sacrifice thine own honor, as well as that of any other person, to save me from what thou think'st a step so terrible. But, remember" — he spoke these words with the most stern decision — "you speak of the Countess of Leicester."

"I do, my lord," said Varney; "but it is for the welfare of the Earl of Leicester. My tale is but begun. I do most strongly believe that this Tressilian has, from the beginning of his moving in her cause, been in connivance with her ladyship the countess."

"Thou speak'st wild madness, Varney. Where or how could they communicate together?"

"My lord," said Varney, "unfortunately I can show that but too well. It was just before the supplication was presented to the Queen, in Tressilian's name, that I met him, to my utter astonishment, at the postern gate which leads from the demesne at Cumnor Place."

"Thou met'st him, villain! and why didst thou not strike him dead?" exclaimed Leicester.

"I drew on him, my lord, and he on me; and had not my foot slipped, he would not, perhaps, have been again a stumbling block in your lordship's path."

Leicester seemed struck dumb with surprise. At length he

answered, "What other evidence hast thou of this, Varney, save thine own assertion? for, as I will punish deeply, I will examine coolly and warily. Sacred Heaven! but no — I will examine coldly and warily — coldly and warily." He repeated these words more than once to himself, as if in the very sound there was a sedative quality; and again compressing his lips, as if he feared some violent expression might escape from them, he asked again, "what farther proof?"

"Enough, my lord," said Varney, "and to spare. I would it rested with me alone, for with me it might have been silenced for ever. But my servant, Michael Lambourne, witnessed the whole, and was, indeed, the means of first introducing Tressilian into Cumnor Place; and therefore I took him into my service, though something of a debauched fellow, that I might have his tongue always under my own command." He then acquainted Lord Leicester how easy it was to prove the circumstance of their interview true, by evidence of Anthony Foster. In the whole narrative, Varney hazarded nothing fabulous, excepting that, by inference, he led his patron to suppose that the interview bewixt Amy and Tressilian at Cumnor Place had been longer than the few minutes to which it was in reality limited.

"And wherefore was I not told of all this?" said Leicester, sternly.

"Because, my lord," replied Varney, "the countess pretended to Foster and to me that Tressilian had intruded himself upon her; and I concluded that she would at her own time tell your lordship."

"Methinks the wife of the Earl of Leicester might speak for a short time with such a person as Tressilian without injury to me or suspicion to herself."

"Questionless, my lord," answered Varney; "had I thought otherwise, I had been no keeper of the secret. But here lies the rub — Tressilian leaves not the place without establishing a correspondence with a poor man, the landlord of an inn in

Cumnor, for the purpose of carrying off the lady. He sent down an emissary of his. This fellow, this agent makes his way to the Place as a peddler, holds conferences with the lady, and they make their escape together by night; rob a poor fellow of a horse by the way, such was their guilty haste; and at length reach this castle, where the Countess of Leicester finds refuge — I dare not say in what place."

"Speak, I command thee," said Leicester — "speak, while I retain sense enough to hear thee."

"Since it must be so," answered Varney, "the lady resorted immediately to the apartment of Tressilian, where she remained many hours, partly in company with him and partly alone."

"It is false — false as the smoke of hell! Ambitious she may be — fickle and impatient — 'tis a woman's fault; but false to me! never, never. The proof — the proof of this!" he exclaimed, hastily.

"Carrol, the deputy marshal, ushered her thither by her own desire on yesterday afternoon; Lambourne and the warder both found her there at an early hour this morning."

"Was Tressilian there with her?" said Leicester, in the same hurried tone.

"No, my lord. You may remember," answered Varney, "that he was that night placed with Sir Nicholas Blount, under a species of arrest."

"Did Carrol, or the other fellows, know who she was?" demanded Leicester.

"No, my lord," replied Varney. "Carrol and the warder had never seen the countess, and Lambourne knew her not in her disguise; but, in seeking to prevent her leaving the cell, he obtained possession of one of her gloves, which, I think, your lordship may know."

He gave the glove, which had the bear and ragged staff, the earl's impress, embroidered upon it in seed-pearls.

"I do — I do recognize it," said Leicester. "They were my

own gift. The fellow of it was on the arm which she threw this very day around my neck!" He spoke this with violent agitation.

"Your lordship," said Varney, "might yet further inquire of the lady herself respecting the truth of these passages."

"It needs not — it needs not," said the tortured earl: "it is written in characters of burning light, as if they were branded on my very eyeballs! I see her infamy — I can see nought else; and — gracious Heaven! — for this vile woman was I about to commit to danger the lives of so many noble friends — shake the foundation of a lawful throne — carry the sword and torch through the bosom of a peaceful land — wrong the kind mistress who made me what I am, and would, but for that hell-framed marriage, have made me all that man can be! And thou, villain, why didst thou not speak sooner?"

"My lord," said Varney, "a tear from my lady would have blotted out all I could have said. Besides, I had not these proofs until this very morning, when Anthony Foster's sudden arrival, with the examinations and declarations which he had extorted from the innkeeper Gosling and others, explained the manner of her flight from Cumnor Place, and my own researches discovered the steps which she had taken here."

"Now, may God be praised for the light He has given! so full, so satisfactory, that there breathes not a man in England who shall call my proceeding rash or my revenge unjust. And yet, Varney, so young, so fair, so fawning, and so false! Yet, with what an air of magnanimity she exhorted me to commit my head to the Queen's mercy rather than wear the veil of falsehood a moment longer! Methinks the angel of truth himself can have no such tones of high-souled impulse. Can it be so, Varney? Can falsehood use thus boldly the language of truth? Can infamy thus assume the guise of purity? Varney, thou hast been my servant from a child; I have raised thee high — can raise thee higher. Think — think for me! Thy brain was ever

shrewd and piercing. May she not be innocent? Prove her so, and all I have yet done for thee shall be as nothing — nothing — in comparison of thy recompense!"

The agony with which his master spoke had some effect even on the hardened Varney, who, in the midst of his own wicked and ambitious designs, really loved his patron as well as such a wretch was capable of loving anything; but he comforted himself, and subdued his self-reproaches, with the reflection that, if he inflicted upon the earl some immediate and transitory pain, it was in order to pave his way to the throne, which, were this marriage dissolved by death or otherwise, he deemed Elizabeth would willingly share with his benefactor. He therefore persevered in his diabolical policy; and, after a moment's consideration, answered the anxious queries of the earl with a melancholy look, as if he had in vain sought some exculpation for the countess; then suddenly raising his head, he said, with an expression of hope, which instantly communicated itself to the countenance of his patron — "Yet wherefore, if guilty, should she have periled herself by coming hither? Why not rather have fled to her father's or elsewhere? — though that, indeed, might have interfered with her desire to be acknowledged as Countess of Leicester."

"True — true — true!" exclaimed Leicester, his transient gleam of hope giving way to the utmost bitterness of feeling and expression. She would not quit the estate and title of the wittol who had wedded her. Ay, and if in my madness I had started into rebellion, or if the angry Queen had taken my head, as she this morning threatened, the wealthy dower which law would have assigned to the Countess Dowager of Leicester had been no bad windfall to the beggarly Tressilian. Speak not for her, Varney; I will have her blood!"

"My lord," replied Varney, "the wildness of your distress breaks forth in the wildness of your language."

"I say, speak not for her," replied Leicester; "she has dis-

honored me — she would have murdered me; all ties are burst between us. She shall die the death of a traitress! And — what is this casket," he said, " which was even now thrust into my hand by a boy, with the desire I would convey it to Tressilian, as he could not give it to the countess? By Heaven! the words surprised me as he spoke them, though other matters chased them from my brain; but now they return with double force. It is her casket of jewels! Force it open, Varney — force the hinges open with thy poniard."

The Earl no sooner saw them give way than he snatched the casket from Sir Richard's hand, wrenched off the cover, and tearing out the splendid contents, flung them on the floor in a transport of rage, while he eagerly searched for some letter or billet which should make the fancied guilt of his innocent countess yet more apparent. Then stamping furiously on the gems, he exclaimed, " Thus I annihilate the miserable toys for which thou hast sold thyself, body and soul, consigned thyself to an early and timeless death, and me to misery and remorse for ever! Tell me not of forgiveness, Varney. She is doomed!"

So saying, he left the room, and rushed into an adjacent closet, the door of which he locked and bolted.

Varney looked after him, while something of a more human feeling seemed to contend with his habitual sneer. " I am sorry for his weakness," he said, " but love has made him a child. He throws down and treads on these costly toys; with the same vehemence would he dash to pieces this frailest toy of all, of which he used to rave so fondly. But that taste also will be forgotten when its object is no more. When Leicester shall be a sovereign, he will think as little of the gales of passion through which he gained that royal port as ever did sailor in harbor of the perils of a voyage. But these telltale articles must not remain here: they are rather too rich vails for the drudges who dress the chamber."

While Varney was employed in gathering together and putting

them into a secret drawer of a cabinet that chanced to be unlocked, he saw the door of Leicester's closet open, the tapestry pushed aside, and the earl's face thrust out, but with eyes so dead, and lips and cheeks so bloodless and pale that he started at the sudden change. No sooner did his eyes encounter the earl's than the latter withdrew his head and shut the door of the closet. This maneuver Leicester repeated twice, without speaking a word, so that Varney began to doubt whether his brain was not actually affected by his mental agony. The third time, however, he beckoned, and Varney obeyed the signal. When he entered, he soon found his patron's perturbation was not caused by insanity, but by the fellness of purpose which he entertained contending with various contrary passions. They passed a full hour in close consultation; after which the Earl of Leicester, with an incredible exertion, dressed himself and went to attend his royal guest.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOWEVER habituated Leicester's mind usually was to play the part of a good courtier, and appear gay, assiduous, and free from all care but that of enhancing the pleasure of the moment, while his bosom internally throbbed with the pangs of unsatisfied ambition, jealousy, or resentment, his heart had now a yet more dreadful guest, whose workings could not be overshadowed or suppressed; and you might read in his vacant eye and troubled brow that his thoughts were far absent from the scenes in which he was compelling himself to play a part. He looked, moved, and spoke as if by a succession of continued efforts; and it seemed as if his will had in some degree lost the promptitude of command over the acute mind and goodly form of which it was the regent.

The singular effects which these distractions of mind produced upon the behavior and conversation of the most accomplished

courtier of England, as they were visible to the lowest and dullest menial who approached his person, could not escape the notice of the most intelligent princess of the age. Nor is there the least doubt that the alternate negligence and irregularity of his manner would have called down Elizabeth's severe displeasure on the Earl of Leicester, had it not occurred to her to account for it by supposing that the apprehension of that displeasure which she had expressed towards him with such vivacity that very morning was dwelling upon the spirits of her favorite. When this idea had once obtained possession of her mind, it proved a full and satisfactory apology for the numerous errors and mistakes of the Earl of Leicester; and the watchful circle around observed with astonishment that, instead of resenting his repeated negligence and want of even ordinary attention, although these were points on which she was usually extremely punctilious, the Queen sought, on the contrary, to afford him time and means to reflect himself, and deigned to assist him in doing so, with an indulgence which seemed altogether inconsistent with her usual character. It was clear, however, that this could not last much longer, and that Elizabeth must finally put another and more severe construction on Leicester's uncourteous conduct, when the earl was summoned by Varney to speak with him in a different apartment.

After having had the message twice delivered to him, he rose, and was about to withdraw, as it were, by instinct; then stopped, and, turning round, entreated permission of the Queen to absent himself for a brief space upon matters of pressing importance.

"Go, my lord," said the Queen; "we are aware our presence must occasion sudden and unexpected occurrences, which require to be provided for on the instant. Yet, my lord, as you would have us believe ourself your welcome and honored guest, we entreat you to think less of our good cheer, and favor us with more of your good countenance than we have this day enjoyed; for, whether prince or peasant be the guest, the welcome of the

host will always be the better part of the entertainment. Go, my lord; and we trust to see you return with an unwrinkled brow and those free thoughts which you are wont to have at the disposal of your friends."

Leicester only bowed low in answer to this rebuke, and retired. At the door of the apartment he was met by Varney, who eagerly drew him apart, and whispered in his ear, "All is well!"

"Has Masters seen her?" said the earl.

"He has, my lord; and as she would neither answer his queries nor allege any reason for her refusal, he will give full testimony that she labors under a mental disorder, and may be best committed to the charge of her friends. The opportunity is therefore free to remove her as we proposed."

"But Tressilian?" said Leicester.

"He will not know of her departure for some time," replied Varney; "it shall take place this very evening, and to-morrow he shall be cared for."

"No, by my soul," answered Leicester; "I will take vengeance on him with mine own hand!"

"You, my lord, and on so inconsiderable a man as Tressilian! No, my lord, he hath long wished to visit foreign parts. Trust him to me: I will take care he returns not hither to tell tales."

"Not so, Varney!" exclaimed Leicester. "Inconsiderable do you call an enemy that hath had power to wound me so deeply that my whole after life must be one scene of remorse and misery? No; rather than forego the right of doing myself justice with my own hand on that accursed villain, I will unfold the whole truth at Elizabeth's footstool, and let her vengeance descend at once on them and on myself."

Varney saw with great alarm that his lord was wrought up to such a pitch of agitation that, if he gave not way to him, he was perfectly capable of adopting the desperate resolution which he had announced.

"My lord," he said, leading him to a mirror, "behold your

reflection in that glass, and think if these agitated features belong to one who, in a condition so extreme, is capable of forming a resolution for himself."

"What, then, wouldst thou make me?" said Leicester, struck at the change in his own physiognomy, though offended at the freedom with which Varney made the appeal. "Am I to be thy ward, thy vassal — the property and subject of my servant?"

"No, my lord," said Varney, firmly, "but be master of yourself and of your own passion. My lord, I, your born servant, am ashamed to see how poorly you bear yourself in the storm of fury. Go to Elizabeth's feet, confess your marriage, and avow yourself, amongst all your peers, the wittol who married a country girl, and was cozened by her and her book-learned gallant. Go, my lord; but first take farewell of Richard Varney, with all the benefits you ever conferred on him. He served the noble, the lofty, the high-minded Leicester. But the abject lord who stoops to every adverse circumstance, whose judicious resolves are scattered like chaff before every wind of passion, him Richard Varney serves not."

Leicester was overpowered by his assumed superiority; it seemed to the unfortunate earl as if his last friend was about to abandon him. He stretched his hand towards Varney as he uttered the words, "Do not leave me. What wouldst thou have me do?"

"Be thyself, my noble master," said Varney, touching the earl's hand with his lips, after having respectfully grasped it in his own — "be yourself, superior to those storms of passion which wreck inferior minds. Let your strong resolve of this morning, which I have both courage, zeal, and means enough to execute, be like the fiat of a superior being, a passionless act of justice. She hath deserved death — let her die!"

While he was speaking, the earl held his hand fast, compressed his lips hard, and frowned, as if he labored to catch from Varney

a portion of the cold, ruthless, and dispassionate firmness which he recommended. When he was silent, the earl still continued to grasp his hand, until, with an effort at calm decision, he was able to articulate, "Be it so — she dies! But one tear might be permitted."

"Not one, my lord," interrupted Varney, who saw by the quivering eye and convulsed cheek of his patron that he was about to give way to a burst of emotion, "not a tear — the time permits it not. Tressilian must be thought of ——"

"That indeed is a name," said the earl, "to convert tears into blood. Varney, I have thought on this, and I have determined — neither entreaty nor argument shall move me — Tressilian shall be my own victim."

"It is madness, my lord; but you are too mighty for me to bar your way to your revenge. Yet resolve at least to choose fitting time and opportunity, and to forbear him until those shall be found."

"Thou shalt order me in what thou wilt," said Leicester, "only thwart me not in this."

"Then, my lord," said Varney, "I first request of you to lay aside the wild, suspected, and half-frenzied demeanor which hath this day drawn the eyes of all the court upon you; and which, but for the Queen's partial indulgence, which she hath extended towards you in a degree far beyond her nature, she had never given you the opportunity to atone for."

"Have I indeed been so negligent?" said Leicester, as one who awakes from a dream. "I thought I had colored it well; but fear nothing, my mind is now eased — I am calm. I will to the Queen instantly; not thine own looks and language shall be more impenetrable than mine. Hast thou aught else to say?"

"I must crave your signet-ring," said Varney, gravely, "in token to those of your servants whom I must employ that I possess your full authority in commanding their aid."

Leicester drew off the signet-ring which he commonly used

and gave it to Varney with a haggard and stern expression of countenance, adding only, in a low, half-whispered tone, but with terrific emphasis, the words, "What thou dost, do quickly."

Some anxiety and wonder took place, meanwhile, in the presence-hall at the prolonged absence of the noble lord of the castle, and great was the delight of his friends when they saw him enter as a man from whose bosom, to all human seeming, a weight of care had been just removed.

With Elizabeth, Leicester played his game as one to whom her natural strength of talent, and her weakness in one or two particular points, were well known. He was too wary to exchange on a sudden the sullen personage which he had played before he retired with Varney; but, on approaching her, it seemed softened into a melancholy, which had a touch of tenderness in it, and which, in the course of conversing with Elizabeth, and as she dropped in compassion one mark of favor after another to console him, passed into a flow of affectionate gallantry the most assiduous, the most delicate, the most insinuating, yet at the same time the most respectful, with which a queen was ever addressed by a subject. Elizabeth listened as in a sort of enchantment; her jealousy of power was lulled asleep; her resolution to forsake all social or domestic ties, and dedicate herself exclusively to the care of her people, began to be shaken, and once more the star of Dudley culminated in the court horizon.

But Leicester did not enjoy this triumph over nature and over conscience without its being embittered to him, not only by the internal rebellion of his feelings against the violence which he exercised over them, but by many accidental circumstances, which, in the course of the banquet, and during the subsequent amusements of the evening, jarred upon that nerve the least vibration of which was agony.

The courtiers were, for example, in the great hall, after having left the banqueting-room, awaiting the appearance of a splendid masque, which was the expected entertainment of this even-

ing, when the Queen interrupted a wild career of wit which the Earl of Leicester was running against Lord Willoughby, Raleigh, and some other courtiers, by saying, "We will impeach you of high treason, my lord, if you proceed in this attempt to slay us with laughter. And here comes a thing may make us all grave at his pleasure, our learned physician Masters, with news belike of our poor suppliant, Lady Varney; nay, my lord, we will not have you leave us, for this being a dispute betwixt married persons, we do not hold our own experience deep enough to decide thereon, without good counsel. How now, Masters, what think'st thou of the runaway bride?"

The smile with which Leicester had been speaking when the Queen interrupted him remained arrested on his lips, as if it had been carved there by the chisel of Michael Angelo or of Chantrey; and he listened to the speech of the physician with the same immovable cast of countenance.

"The Lady Varney, gracious sovereign," said the court physician Masters, "is sullen, and would hold little conference with me touching the state of her health, talking wildly of being soon to plead her own cause before your own presence, and of answering no meaner person's inquiries."

"Now, the Heavens forefend!" said the Queen; "we have already suffered from the misconstructions and broils which seem to follow this poor brainsick lady wherever she comes. Think you not so, my lord?" she added, appealing to Leicester, with something in her look that indicated regret, even tenderly expressed, for their disagreement of that morning. Leicester compelled himself to bow low. The utmost force he could exert was inadequate to the farther effort of expressing in words his acquiescence in the Queen's sentiment.

"You are vindictive," she said, "my lord; but we will find time and place to punish you. But once more to this same trouble-mirth — this Lady Varney. What of her health, Masters?"

"She is sullen, madam, as I already said," replied Masters, "and refuses to answer interrogatories or be amenable to the authority of the mediciner. I conceive her to be possessed with a delirium, and I think she were best cared for by her husband in his own house, and removed from all this bustle of pageants, which disturbs her weak brain with the most fantastic phantoms. She drops hints as if she were some great person in disguise — some countess or princess perchance. God help them, such are often the hallucinations of these infirm persons! "

"Nay, then," said the Queen, "away with her with all speed. Let Varney care for her with fitting humanity; but let them rid the castle of her forthwith. She will think herself lady of all, I warrant you. It is pity so fair a form, however, should have an infirm understanding. What think you, my lord? "

"It is pity indeed," said the earl, repeating the words like a task which was set him.

"But, perhaps," said Elizabeth, "you do not join with us in our opinion of her beauty; and indeed we have known men prefer a statelier and more Juno-like form to that drooping, fragile one, that hung its head like a broken lily. I could think with you, Rutland, that, give my Lord of Leicester such a piece of painted wax for a bride, he would have wished her dead ere the end of the honeymoon."

As she said this, she looked on Leicester so expressively that, while his heart revolted against the egregious falsehood, he did himself so much violence as to reply in a whisper, that Leicester's love was more lowly than her Majesty deemed, since it was settled where he could never command, but must ever obey.

The Queen blushed, and bid him be silent; yet looked as if she expected that he would not obey her commands. But at that moment the flourish of trumpets and kettledrums from a high balcony which overlooked the hall announced the entrance of the masquers, and relieved Leicester from the horrible state of

constraint and dissimulation in which the result of his own duplicity had placed him.

The doors of the hall were thrown wide, and no less a person entered than the fiend-born Merlin, dressed in a strange and mystical attire, suited to his ambiguous birth and magical power. About him and behind him fluttered or gamboled many extraordinary forms, intended to represent the spirits who waited to do his powerful bidding; and so much did this part of the pageant interest the menials and others of the lower class then in the castle, that many of them forgot even the reverence due to the Queen's presence so far as to thrust themselves into the lower part of the hall.

The Earl of Leicester, seeing his officers had some difficulty to repel these intruders, without more disturbance than was fitting where the Queen was in presence, arose and went himself to the bottom of the hall; Elizabeth, at the same time, with her usual feeling for the common people, requesting that they might be permitted to remain undisturbed to witness the pageant. Leicester went under this pretext; but his real motive was to gain a moment to himself, and to relieve his mind, were it but for one instant, from the dreadful task of hiding, under the guise of gaiety and gallantry, the lacerating pangs of shame, anger, remorse, and thirst for vengeance. He imposed silence by his look and sign upon the vulgar crowd at the lower end of the apartment; but, instead of instantly returning to wait on her Majesty, he wrapped his cloak around him, and mixing with the crowd, stood in some degree an undistinguished spectator of the progress of the masque.

Merlin and his assistants had begun to remove from the crowded hall, when Leicester, who was, as we have mentioned, stationed for the moment near the bottom of the hall, and consequently engaged in some degree in the crowd, felt himself pulled by the cloak, while a voice whispered in his ear, "My lord, I do desire some instant conference with you."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"I desire some conference with you." The words were simple in themselves, but Lord Leicester was in that alarmed and feverish state of mind when the most ordinary occurrences seem fraught with alarming import; and he turned hastily round to survey the person by whom they had been spoken. There was nothing remarkable in the speaker's appearance, which consisted of a black silk doublet and short mantle, with a black vizard on his face; for it appeared he had been among the crowd of masks who had thronged into the hall in the retinue of Merlin, though he did not wear any of the extravagant disguises by which most of them were distinguished.

"Who are you, or what do you want with me?" said Leicester, not without betraying, by his accents, the hurried state of his spirits.

"No evil, my lord," answered the mask, "but much good and honor, if you will rightly understand my purpose. But I must speak with you more privately."

"I can speak with no nameless stranger," answered Leicester, dreading he knew not precisely what from the request of the stranger; "and those who are known to me must seek another and a fitter time to ask an interview."

He would have hurried away, but the mask still detained him.

"Those who talk to your lordship of what your own honor demands have a right over your time, whatever occupations you may lay aside in order to indulge them."

"How! my honor! Who dare impeach it?" said Leicester.

"Your own conduct alone can furnish grounds for accusing it, my lord, and it is that topic on which I would speak with you."

"You are insolent," said Leicester, "and abuse the hospitable license of the time, which prevents me from having you punished. I demand your name?"

"Edmund Tressilian of Cornwall," answered the mask. "My tongue has been bound by a promise for four-and-twenty hours; the space is passed — I now speak, and do your lordship the justice to address myself first to you."

The thrill of astonishment which penetrated Leicester's very heart at first rendered him immovable, but instantly gave way to such a thirst for revenge as the pilgrim in the desert feels for the water-brooks. He had but sense and self-government enough to prevent his stabbing to the heart the audacious villain who dared, with such unmoved assurance, thus to practice upon him farther. Determined to suppress for the moment every symptom of agitation in order to perceive the full scope of Tressilian's purpose, as well as to secure his own vengeance, he answered in a tone so altered by restrained passion as scarce to be intelligible — "And what does Master Edmund Tressilian require at my hand?"

"Justice, my lord," answered Tressilian, calmly but firmly.

"Justice," said Leicester, "all men are entitled to. You, Master Tressilian, are peculiarly so, and be assured you shall have it."

"I expect nothing less from your nobleness," answered Tressilian; "but time presses, and I must speak with you to-night. May I wait on you in your chamber?"

"No," answered Leicester, sternly, "not under a roof, and that roof mine own. We will meet under the free cope of heaven."

"You are discomposed or displeased, my lord," replied Tressilian; "yet there is no occasion for distemperature. The place is equal to me, so you allow me one half-hour of your time uninterrupted."

"A shorter time will, I trust, suffice," answered Leicester. "Meet me in the Pleasance, when the Queen has retired to her chamber."

"Enough," said Tressilian, and withdrew; while a sort of rapture seemed for the moment to occupy the mind of Leicester.

"Heaven," he said, "is at last favorable to me, and has put within my reach the wretch who has branded me with this deep ignominy — who has inflicted on me this cruel agony. I will blame fate no more, since I am afforded the means of tracing the wiles by which he means still farther to practice on me, and then of at once convicting and punishing his villainy."

While these reflections thronged through Leicester's mind, he again made his way amid the obsequious crowd, which divided to give him passage, and resumed his place, envied and admired, beside the person of his sovereign. New tortures awaited him as soon as he had rejoined Elizabeth.

"You come in time, my lord," she said, "to decide a dispute between us ladies. Here has Sir Richard Varney asked our permission to depart from the castle with his infirm lady, having, as he tells us, your lordship's consent to his absence, so he can obtain ours. Certes, we have no will to withhold him from the affectionate charge of this poor young person; but you are to know, that Sir Richard Varney hath this day shown himself so much captivated with these ladies of ours, that here is our Duchess of Rutland says, he will carry his poor insane wife no farther than the lake, plunge her in, to tenant the crystal palaces that the enchanted nymph told us of, and return a jolly widower, to dry his tears and to make up the loss among our train. How say you, my lord?"

Leicester was confounded, but the danger was urgent, and a reply absolutely necessary. "The ladies," he said, "think too lightly of one of their own sex in supposing she could deserve such a fate, or too ill of ours, to think it could be inflicted upon an innocent female."

"Hear him, my ladies," said Elizabeth; "like all his sex, he would excuse their cruelty by imputing fickleness to us."

"Say not us, madam," replied the earl; "we say that meaner

women, like the lesser lights of heaven, have revolutions and phases, but who shall impute mutability to the sun or to Elizabeth ? ”

The discourse presently afterwards assumed a less perilous tendency, and Leicester continued to support his part in it with spirit, at whatever expense of mental agony. So pleasing did it seem to Elizabeth, that the castle bell had sounded midnight ere she retired from the company, a circumstance unusual in her quiet and regular habits of disposing of time.

The unfortunate lord of the castle, and founder of the proud festival, retired to far different thoughts. His direction to the valet who attended him was to send Varney instantly to his apartment. The messenger returned after some delay, and informed him that an hour had elapsed since Sir Richard Varney had left the castle by the postern gate, with three other persons, one of whom was transported in a horse litter.

“ How came he to leave the castle after the watch was set ? ” said Leicester. “ I though he went not till daybreak.”

“ He gave satisfactory reasons, as I understand,” said the domestic, “ to the guard, and, as I hear, showed your lordship’s signet —— ”

“ True — true,” said the earl; “ yet he has been hasty. Do any of his attendants remain behind ? ”

“ Michael Lambourne, my lord,” said the valet, “ was not to be found when Sir Richard Varney departed, and his master was much incensed at his absence. I saw him but now saddling his horse to gallop after his master.”

“ Bid him come hither instantly,” said Leicester; “ I have a message to his master.”

The servant left the apartment, and Leicester traversed it for some time in deep meditation. “ Varney is over-zealous,” he said — “ over pressing. He loves me, I think; but he hath his own ends to serve, and he is inexorable in pursuit of them. If I rise he rises, and he hath shown himself already but too eager

to rid me of this obstacle which seems to stand betwixt me and sovereignty. Yet I will not stoop to bear this disgrace. She shall be punished, but it shall be more advisedly. I already feel, even in anticipation, that over-haste would light the flames of hell in my bosom. No; one victim is enough at once, and that victim already awaits me."

He seized upon writing materials, and hastily traced these words:—"Sir Richard Varney, we have resolved to defer the matter entrusted to your care, and strictly command you to proceed no farther in relation to our countess until our further order. We also command your instant return to Kenilworth, as soon as you have safely bestowed that with which you are entrusted. But if the safe-placing of your present charge shall detain you longer than we think for, we command you, in that case, to send back our signet-ring by a trusty and speedy messenger, we having present need of the same. And requiring your strict obedience in these things, and commending you to God's keeping, we rest your assured good friend and master,

"R. LEICESTER.

"Given at our Castle of Kenilworth, the tenth of July, in the year of salvation one thousand five hundred and seventy-five."

As Leicester had finished and sealed this mandate, Michael Lambourne, booted up to mid-thigh, having his riding cloak girthed around him with a broad belt, and a felt cap on his head, like that of a courier, entered his apartment, ushered in by the valet.

"What is thy capacity of service?" said the earl.

"Equerry to your lordship's master of the horse," answered Lambourne, with his customary assurance.

"Tie up thy saucy tongue, sir," said Leicester; "the jests that may suit Sir Richard Varney's presence suit not mine. How soon wilt thou overtake thy master?"

"In one hour's riding, my lord, if man and horse hold good,"

said Lambourne. The earl measured him with his eye from top to toe.

"I have heard of thee," he said: "men say thou art a prompt fellow in thy service, but too much given to brawling and to was-sail to be trusted with things of moment."

"My lord," said Lambourne, "I have been soldier, sailor, traveler, and adventurer; and these are all trades in which men enjoy to-day because they have no surety of to-morrow. But though I may misuse mine own leisure, I have never neglected the duty I owe my master."

"See that it be so in this instance," said Leicester, "and it shall do thee good. Deliver this letter speedily and carefully into Sir Richard Varney's hands."

"Does my commission reach no farther?" said Lambourne.

"No," answered Leicester; "but it deeply concerns me that it be carefully as well as hastily executed."

"I will spare neither care nor horseflesh," answered Lambourne, and immediately took his leave.

"So this is the end of my private audience, from which I hoped so much!" he muttered to himself, as he went through the long gallery and down the back staircase. I thought the earl had wanted a cast of mine office in some secret intrigue, and it all ends in carrying a letter! Well, his pleasure shall be done, however, and, as his lordship well says, it may do me good another time. The child must creep ere he walk, and so must your infant courtier. I will have a look into this letter, however, which he hath sealed so sloven-like." Having accomplished this, he clapped his hands together in ecstasy, exclaiming, "The countess — the countess! I have the secret that shall make or mar me."

As soon as Lambourne and the valet had left the apartment, Leicester proceeded to change his dress for a very plain one, threw his mantle around him, and, taking a lamp in his hand, went by the private passage of communication to a small secret

postern door which opened into the courtyard, and entered the superb precincts of the Pleasance, then illumined by the full moon. The numerous statues of white marble glimmered in the pale light, and the fountains threw their jets into the air, ere they fell down again upon their basins in showers of sparkling silver. The day had been sultry, and the gentle night breeze, which sighed along the terrace of the Pleasance, raised not a deeper breath than the fan in the hand of youthful beauty. The bird of summer night had built many a nest in the bowers of the adjacent garden, and the tenants now indemnified themselves for silence during the day by a full chorus of their own unrivaled warblings, now joyous, now pathetic, now united, now responsive to each other, as if to express their delight in the placid and delicious scene to which they poured their melody.

Musing on matters far different from the fall of waters, the gleam of moonlight, or the song of the nightingale, the stately Leicester walked slowly from the one end of the terrace to the other, his cloak wrapped around him, and his sword under his arm, without seeing anything resembling the human form.

"I have been fooled by my own generosity," he said, "if I have suffered the villain to escape me."

This thought was instantly dispelled when, turning to look back towards the entrance, he saw a human form advancing slowly from the portico.

"Shall I strike ere I again hear his detested voice?" was Leicester's thought, as he grasped the hilt of the sword. "But no! I will see which way his vile practice tends. I will watch, disgusting as it is, the coils and mazes of the loathsome snake, ere I put forth my strength and crush him."

His hand quitted the sword hilt, and he advanced slowly towards Tressilian, collecting, for their meeting, all the self-possession he could command, until they came front to front with each other.

Tressilian made a profound reverence, to which the earl replied

with a haughty inclination of the head, and the words, "You sought secret conference with me, sir; I am here, and attentive."

"My lord," said Tressilian, "I am so earnest in that which I have to say, and so desirous to find a patient, nay, a favorable hearing, that I will stoop to exculpate myself from whatever might prejudice your lordship against me. You think me your enemy?"

"Have I not some apparent cause?" answered Leicester, perceiving that Tressilian paused for a reply.

"You do me wrong, my lord. I am a friend, but neither a dependant nor partisan, of the Earl of Sussex, whom courtiers call your rival; and it is some considerable time since I ceased to regard either courts or court intrigues as suited to my temper or genius."

"No doubt, sir," answered Leicester, "there are other occupations more worthy a scholar, and for such the world holds Master Tressilian: love has his intrigues as well as ambition."

"I perceive, my lord," replied Tressilian, "you give much weight to my early attachment for the unfortunate young person of whom I am about to speak, and perhaps think I am prosecuting her cause out of rivalry more than a sense of justice."

"No matter for my thoughts, sir," said the earl; "proceed. You have as yet spoken of yourself only. Spare me farther prelude, sir, and speak to the purpose, if indeed you have aught to say that concerns me. When you have done, I, in my turn, have something to communicate."

"I will speak, then, without farther prelude, my lord," answered Tressilian; "having to say that which, as it concerns your lordship's honor, I am confident you will not think your time wasted in listening to. I have to request an account from your lordship of the unhappy Amy Robsart, whose history is too well known to you. I regret deeply that I did not at once take this course, and make yourself judge between me and the villain by whom she is injured. My lord, she extricated herself from an unlawful and most perilous state of confinement, trusting to the

effects of her own remonstrance upon her unworthy husband, and extorted from me a promise that I would not interfere in her behalf until she had used her own efforts to have her rights acknowledged by him."

"Ha!" said Leicester, "remember you to whom you speak?"

"I speak of her unworthy husband, my lord, repeated Tressilian, "and my respect can find no softer language. The unhappy young woman is withdrawn from my knowledge, and sequestered in some secret place of this castle — if she be not transferred to some place of seclusion better fitted for bad designs. This must be reformed, my lord — I speak it as authorized by her father — and this ill-fated marriage must be avouched and proved in the Queen's presence, and the lady placed without restraint and at her own free disposal. And, permit me to say, it concerns no one's honor that these most just demands of mine should be complied with so much as it does that of your lordship."

The earl stood as if he had been petrified, at the extreme coolness with which the man, whom he considered as having injured him so deeply, pleaded the cause of the countess; nor was his wonder lessened by the warmth with which Tressilian seemed to demand for her the rank and situation which she had disgraced, and the advantages of which she was doubtless to share with the lover who advocated her cause with such effrontery. Tressilian had been silent for more than a minute ere the earl recovered from the excess of his astonishment; and, considering the prepossessions with which his mind was occupied, there is little wonder that his passion gained the mastery of every other consideration. "I have heard you, Master Tressilian," said he, "without interruption, and I bless God that my ears were never before made to tingle by the words of so frontless a villain. The task of chastising you is fitter for the hangman's scourge than the sword of a nobleman, but yet — Villain, draw and defend thyself!"

As he spoke the last words, he dropped his mantle on the ground, struck Tressilian smartly with his sheathed sword, and instantly drawing his rapier, put himself into a posture of assault. The vehement fury of his language at first filled Tressilian, in his turn, with surprise equal to what Leicester had felt when he addressed him. But astonishment gave rise to resentment, when the unmerited insults of his language were followed by a blow, which immediately put to flight every thought save that of instant combat. Tressilian's sword was instantly drawn, and though perhaps somewhat inferior to Leicester in the use of the weapon, he understood it well enough to maintain the contest with great spirit, the rather that of the two he was for the time the more cool, since he could not help imputing Leicester's conduct either to actual frenzy or to the influence of some strong delusion.

The rencontre had continued for several minutes, without either party receiving a wound, when of a sudden voices were heard beneath the portico, which formed the entrance of the terrace, mingled with the steps of men advancing hastily. "We are interrupted," said Leicester to his antagonist; "follow me."

At the same time a voice from the portico said, "The jack-nape is right; they are tilting here."

Leicester, meanwhile, drew off Tressilian into a sort of recess behind one of the fountains, which served to conceal them, while six of the yeomen of the Queen's guard passed along the middle walk of the Pleasance, and they could hear one say to the rest, "We shall never find them to-night amongst all these squirting funnels, squirrel cages, and rabbit holes; but if we light not on them before we reach the farther end, we will return, and mount a guard at the entrance, and so secure them till morning."

"A proper matter," said another, "the drawing of swords so near the Queen's presence, ay, and in her very palace as 'twere! Hang it, they must be some poor drunken gamecocks fallen to sparring; 'twere pity almost we should find them — the penalty

is chopping off a hand, is it not ? 'Twere hard to lose hand for handling a bit of steel that comes so natural to one's gripe."

They passed on, making a kind of careless search, but seemingly more intent on their own conversation than bent on discovering the persons who had created the nocturnal disturbance.

They had no sooner passed forward along the terrace than Leicester, making a sign to Tressilian to follow him, glided away in an opposite direction, and escaped through the portico undiscovered. He conducted Tressilian to Mervyn's Tower, in which he was now again lodged; and then, ere parting with him, said these words, "If thou hast courage to continue and bring to an end what is thus broken off, be near me when the court goes forth to-morrow; we shall find a time, and I will give you a signal when it is fitting."

"My lord," said Tressilian, "at another time I might have inquired the meaning of this strange and furious inveteracy against me. But you have laid that on my shoulder which only blood can wash away; and were you as high as your proudest wishes ever carried you, I would have from you satisfaction for my wounded honor."

On these terms they parted, but the adventures of the night were not yet ended with Leicester. He was compelled to pass by Saintlowe's Tower in order to gain the private passage which led to his own chamber, and in the entrance thereof he met Lord Hunsdon half-clothed and with a naked sword under his arm.

"Are you awakened, too, with this 'larum, my Lord of Leicester?" said the old soldier. "'Tis well. The nights are as noisy as the day in this castle of yours. Some two hours since, I was waked by the screams of that poor brainsick Lady Varney, whom her husband was forcing away. I promise you, it required both your warrant and the Queen's to keep me from entering into the game, and cutting that Varney of yours over the head."

The old man's speech went through the earl's heart like a knife; but, bidding Lord Hunsdon good-night, he entered the

private passage, took up the lamp which he had left there, and by its expiring light found the way to his own apartment.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE amusement with which Elizabeth and her court were next day to be regaled was an exhibition by the true-hearted men of Coventry, who were to represent the strife between the English and the Danes, agreeably to a custom long preserved in their ancient borough, and warranted for truth by old histories and chronicles. In this pageant, one party of the townsfolk presented the Saxons and the other the Danes, and set forth, both in rude rhymes and with hard blows, the contentions of these two firece nations, and the Amazonian courage of the English women, who, according to the story, were the principal agents in the general massacre of the Danes, which took place at Hocktide, in the year of God 1012.

Accordingly, after a morning repast, the principal persons of the court, in attendance upon her Majesty, pressed to the Gallery Tower, to witness the approach of the two contending parties of English and Danes; and after a signal had been given, the gate which opened in the circuit of the chase was thrown wide to admit them. On they came, foot and horse; for some of the more ambitious burghers and yeomen had put themselves into fantastic dresses, imitating knights, in order to resemble the chivalry of the two different nations. However, to prevent fatal accidents, they were not permitted to appear on real horses, but had only license to accouter themselves with those hobby-horses, as they are called, which anciently formed the chief delight of a morris dance.

Their first charge upon each other was rather moderate, for either party had some dread of being forced into the lake. But as reinforcements came up on either side, the encounter grew

from a skirmish into a blazing battle. They rushed upon one another, as Master Laneham testifies, like rams inflamed by jealousy, with such furious encounter that both parties were often overthrown, and the clubs and targets made a most horrible clatter. In many instances that happened which had been dreaded by the more experienced warriors who began the day of strife. The rails which defended the ledges of the bridge had been, perhaps on purpose, left but slightly fastened, and gave way under the pressure of those who thronged to the combat, so that the hot courage of many of the combatants received a sufficient cooling. These incidents might have occasioned more serious damage than became such an affray, for many of the champions who met with this mischance could not swim, and those who could were encumbered with their suits of leathern and of paper armor; but the case had been provided for, and there were several boats in readiness to pick up the unfortunate warriors and convey them to the dry land, where, dripping and dejected, they comforted themselves with the hot ale and strong waters which were liberally allowed to them, without showing any desire to re-enter so desperate a conflict.

These rough rural gambols may not altogether agree with the reader's preconceived idea of an entertainment presented before Elizabeth, in whose reign letters revived with such brilliancy, and whose court, governed by a female whose sense of propriety was equal to her strength of mind, was no less distinguished for delicacy and refinement than her councils for wisdom and fortitude. But whether from the political wish to seem interested in popular sports, or whether from a spark of old Henry's rough masculine spirit, which Elizabeth sometimes displayed, it is certain the Queen laughed heartily. She called near her person the Earl of Sussex and Lord Hunsdon, partly perhaps to make amends to the former for the long and private audiences with which she had indulged the Earl of Leicester, by engaging him in conversation upon a pastime which better suited his taste than

those pageants that were furnished forth from the stores of antiquity. The disposition which the Queen showed to laugh and jest with her military leaders gave the Earl of Leicester the opportunity he had been watching for withdrawing from the royal presence, which to the court around, so well had he chosen his time, had the graceful appearance of leaving his rival free access to the Queen's person.

Leicester's thoughts, however, had a far different object from mere courtesy; for no sooner did he see the Queen fairly engaged in conversation with Sussex and Hunsdon, behind whose back stood Sir Nicholas Blount, grinning from ear to ear at each word which was spoken, than, making a sign to Tressilian, who, according to appointment, watched his motions at a little distance, he extricated himself from the press, and walking towards the chase, made his way through the crowds of ordinary spectators, who, with open mouth, stood gazing on the battle of the English and the Danes. When he had accomplished this, which was a work of some difficulty, he shot another glance behind him to see that Tressilian had been equally successful, and as soon as he saw him also free from the crowd, he led the way to a small thicket, behind which stood a lackey with two horses ready saddled. He flung himself on the one, and made signs to Tressilian to mount the other, who obeyed without speaking a single word.

Leicester then spurred his horse, and galloped without stopping until he reached a sequestered spot, environed by lofty oaks, about a mile's distance from the castle, and in an opposite direction from the scene to which curiosity was drawing every spectator. He there dismounted, bound his horse to a tree, and only pronouncing the words, "Here there is no risk of interruption," laid his cloak across his saddle and drew his sword.

Tressilian imitated his example punctually, yet could not forbear saying, as he drew his weapon, "My lord, as I have been known to many as one who does not fear death, when placed in balance with honor, methinks I may without derogation ask,

wherefore, in the name of all that is honorable, your lordship has dared to offer me such a mark of disgrace as places us on these terms with respect to each other ? ”

“ If you like not such marks of my scorn,” replied the earl, “ betake yourself instantly to your weapon, lest I repeat the usage you complain of.”

“ It shall not need, my lord,” said Tressilian. “ God judge betwixt us! and your blood, if you fall, be on your own head.”

He had scarce completed the sentence when they instantly closed in combat.

But Leicester, who was a perfect master of defence among all other exterior accomplishments of the time, had seen, on the preceding night, enough of Tressilian’s strength and skill to make him fight with more caution than heretofore, and prefer a secure revenge to a hasty one. For some minutes they fought with equal skill and fortune, till, in a desperate lounge which Leicester successfully put aside, Tressilian exposed himself at disadvantage; and, in a subsequent attempt to close, the earl forced his sword from his hand and stretched him on the ground. With a grim smile, he held the point of his rapier within two inches of the throat of his fallen adversary, and placing his foot at the same time upon his breast, bid him confess his villainous wrongs towards him, and prepare for death.

“ I have no villainy nor wrong towards thee to confess,” answered Tressilian, “ and am better prepared for death than thou. Use thine advantage as thou wilt, and may God forgive you! I have given you no cause for this.”

“ No cause!” exclaimed the earl — “ no cause! But why parley with such a slave? Die a liar, as thou hast lived!”

He had withdrawn his arm for the purpose of striking the fatal blow, when it was suddenly seized from behind.

The earl turned in wrath to shake off the unexpected obstacle, but was surprised to find that a strange-looking boy had hold of his sword arm, and clung to it with such tenacity of grasp that

he could not shake him off without a considerable struggle, in the course of which Tressilian had opportunity to rise and possess himself once more of his weapon. Leicester again turned towards him with looks of unabated ferocity, and the combat would have recommenced with still more desperation on both sides, had not the boy clung to Lord Leicester's knees, and in a shrill tone implored him to listen one moment ere he prosecuted this quarrel.

"Stand up, and let me go," said Leicester, "or, by Heaven, I will pierce thee with my rapier! What hast thou to do to bar my way to revenge?"

"Much — much!" exclaimed the undaunted boy; "since my folly has been the cause of these bloody quarrels between you, and perchance of worse evils. Oh, if you would ever again enjoy the peace of an innocent mind, if you hope again to sleep in peace and unhaunted by remorse, take so much leisure as to peruse this letter, and then do as you list."

While he spoke in this eager and earnest manner, to which his singular features and voice gave a goblin-like effect, he held up to Leicester a packet, secured with a long tress of woman's hair, of a beautiful light brown color. Enraged as he was, nay, almost blinded with fury to see his destined revenge so strangely frustrated, the Earl of Leicester could not resist this extraordinary suppliant. He snatched the letter from his hand, changed color as he looked on the superscription, undid, with faltering hand, the knot which secured it, glanced over the contents, and, staggering back, would have fallen, had he not rested against the trunk of a tree, where he stood for an instant, his eyes bent on the letter, and his sword point turned to the ground, without seeming to be conscious of the presence of an antagonist towards whom he had shown little mercy, and who might in turn have taken him at advantage. But for such revenge Tressilian was too noble-minded; he also stood still in surprise, waiting the issue of this strange fit of passion, but holding his weapon ready

to defend himself, in case of need, against some new and sudden attack on the part of Leicester, whom he again suspected to be under the influence of actual frenzy. The boy, indeed, he easily recognized as his old acquaintance Dickon, whose face, once seen, was scarcely to be forgotten; but how he came thither at so critical a moment, why his interference was so energetic, and, above all, how it came to produce so powerful an effect upon Leicester, were questions which he could not solve.

But the letter was of itself powerful enough to work effects yet more wonderful. It was that which the unfortunate Amy had written to her husband, in which she alleged the reasons and manner of her flight from Cumnor Place, informed him of her having made her way to Kenilworth to enjoy his protection, and mentioned the circumstances which had compelled her to take refuge in Tressilian's apartment, earnestly requesting he would, without delay, assign her a more suitable asylum. The letter concluded with the most earnest expressions of devoted attachment and submission to his will in all things, and particularly respecting her situation and place of residence, conjuring him only that she might not be placed under the guardianship or restraint of Varney.

The letter dropped from Leicester's hand when he had perused it. "Take my sword," he said, "Tressilian, and pierce my heart, as I would but now have pierced yours!"

"My lord," said Tressilian, "you have done me great wrong; but something within my breast ever whispered that it was by egregious error."

"Error indeed!" said Leicester, and handed him the letter; "I have been made to believe a man of honor a villain, and the best and purest of creatures a false profligate. Wretched boy, why comes this letter now, and where has the bearer lingered?"

"I dare not tell you, my lord," said the boy, withdrawing, as if to keep beyond his reach; "but here comes one who was the messenger."

Wayland at the same moment came up; and, interrogated by Leicester, hastily detailed all the circumstances of his escape with Amy, the fatal practices which had driven her to flight, and her anxious desire to throw herself under the instant protection of her husband, pointing out the evidence of the domestics of Kenilworth, "who could not," he observed, "but remember her eager inquiries after the Earl of Leicester on her first arrival."

"The villains!" exclaimed Leicester; "but oh, that worst of villains, Varney! and she is even now in his power!"

"But not, I trust in God," said Tressilian, "with any commands of fatal import?"

"No — no — no!" exclaimed the earl, hastily. "I said something in madness; but it was recalled — fully recalled — by a hasty messenger; and she is now — she must now be safe."

"Yes," said Tressilian, "she *must* be safe, and I *must* be assured of her safety. My own quarrel with you is ended, my lord; but there is another to begin with him who has so cruelly wronged Amy Robsart, and who has screened his guilt under the cloak of the infamous Varney."

"Wronged Amy!" replied Leicester, with a voice like thunder. "She is as surely Countess of Leicester as I am belted earl. Nor can you, sir, point out that manner of justice which I will not render her at my own free will. I need scarce say, I fear not your compulsion."

Tressilian had by no means undoubting confidence in the fluctuating resolutions of Leicester, whose mind seemed to him agitated beyond the government of calm reason; neither did he, notwithstanding the assurances he had received, think Amy safe in the hands of his dependants. "My lord," he said, calmly, "I mean you no offence, and am far from seeking a quarrel. But my duty to Sir Hugh Robsart compels me to carry this matter instantly to the Queen, that the countess's rank may be acknowledged in her person."

"You shall not need, sir," replied the earl, haughtily; "do not dare to interfere. No voice but Dudley's shall proclaim Dudley's infamy. To Elizabeth herself will I tell it, and then for Cumnor Place with the speed of life and death!"

So saying, he unbound his horse from the tree, threw himself into the saddle, and rode at full gallop towards the castle.

"Take me before you, Master Tressilian," said the boy, seeing Tressilian mount in the same haste; "my tale is not all told out, and I need your protection."

Tressilian complied, and followed the earl, though at a less furious rate. By the way the boy confessed, with much contrition, that in resentment at Wayland's evading all his inquiries concerning the lady, he had purloined from him, in revenge, the letter with which Amy had entrusted him for the Earl of Leicester. His purpose was to have restored it to him that evening. Not being able to find him, or to get speech of Tressilian, and finding himself in possession of a letter addressed to no less a person than the Earl of Leicester, he became much afraid of the consequences of his frolic. The caution, and indeed the alarm, which Wayland had expressed respecting Varney and Lambourne, led him to judge that the letter must be designed for the earl's own hand, and that he might prejudice the lady by giving it to any of the domestics. He made an attempt or two to obtain an audience of Leicester, but the singularity of his features and the meanness of his appearance occasioned his being always repulsed by the insolent menials whom he applied to for that purpose. Once, indeed, he had nearly succeeded, when, in prowling about, he found in the grotto the casket which he knew to belong to the unlucky countess, having seen it on her journey, for nothing escaped his prying eye. Having strove in vain to restore it either to Tressilian or the countess, he put it into the hands, as we have seen, of Leicester himself, but unfortunately he did not recognize him in his disguise.

At length the boy thought he was on the point of succeeding,

when the earl came down to the lower part of the hall; but just as he was about to accost him, he was prevented by Tressilian. As sharp in ear as in wit, the boy heard the appointment settled betwixt them to take place in the Pleasance, and resolved to add a third to the party, in hopes that, either in coming or in returning, he might find an opportunity of delivering the letter to Leicester; for strange stories began to flit among the domestics, which alarmed him for the lady's safety. Accident, however, detained Dickon a little behind the earl, and, as he reached the arcade, he saw them engaged in combat; in consequence of which he hastened to alarm the guard, having little doubt that what bloodshed took place betwixt them might arise out of his own frolic. Continuing to lurk in the portico, he heard the second appointment which Leicester, at parting, assigned to Tressilian, and was keeping them in view during the encounter of the Coventry men, when, to his surprise, he recognized Wayland in the crowd, much disguised, indeed, but not sufficiently so to escape the prying glance of his old comrade. They drew aside out of the crowd to explain their situation to each other. The boy confessed to Wayland what we have above told, and the artist, in return, informed him that his deep anxiety for the fate of the unfortunate lady had brought him back to the neighborhood of the castle, upon his learning that morning at a village about ten miles distant that Varney and Lambourne, whose violence he dreaded, had both left Kenilworth over-night.

While they spoke, they saw Leicester and Tressilian separate themselves from the crowd, dogged them until they mounted their horses, when the boy, whose speed of foot has been before mentioned, though he could not possibly keep up with them, yet arrived, as we have seen, soon enough to save Tressilian's life. The boy had just finished his tale when they reached the Gallery Tower.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

As Tressilian rode along the bridge lately the scene of so much riotous sport, he could not but observe that men's countenances had singularly changed during the space of his brief absence. The mock fight was over, but the men, still habited in their masquing suits, stood together in groups, like the inhabitants of a city who have been just startled by some strange and alarming news.

When he reached the base court, appearances were the same: domestics, retainers, and under officers stood together and whispered, bending their eyes towards the windows of the great hall, with looks which seemed at once alarmed and mysterious.

Sir Nicholas Blount was the first person of his own particular acquaintance Tressilian saw, who left him no time to make inquiries, but greeted him with, "God help thy heart, Tressilian, thou art fitter for a clown than a courtier; thou canst not attend, as becomes one who follows her Majesty. Here you are called for, wished for, waited for — no man but you will serve the turn; and hither you come with a misbegotten brat on thy horse's neck, as if thou wert dry nurse to some sucking devil, and wert just returned from airing."

"Why, what is the matter?" said Tressilian, letting go the boy, who sprung to ground like a feather, and himself dismounting at the same time.

"Why, no one knows the matter," replied Blount: "I cannot smell it out myself, though I have a nose like other courtiers. Only, my Lord of Leicester has galloped along the bridge, as if he would have rode over all in his passage, demanded an audience of the Queen, and is closeted even now with her and Burleigh and Walsingham; and you are called for; but whether the matter be treason or worse, no one knows."

"He speaks true, by Heaven!" said Raleigh, who that instant appeared; "you must immediately to the Queen's presence."

"Be not rash, Raleigh," said Blount, "remember his boots. For Heaven's sake go to my chamber, dear Tressilian, and don my new bloom-colored silken hose; I have worn them but twice."

"Pshaw!" answered Tressilian; "do thou take care of this boy, Blount; be kind to him, and look he escapes you not — much depends on him."

So saying, he followed Raleigh, hastily, leaving honest Blount with the bridle of his horse in one hand and the boy in the other.

Blount gave a long look after him. "Nobody," he said, "calls me to these mysteries; and he leaves me here to play horsekeeper and childkeeper at once. Whence come ye, my fair-favored little gossip?"

"From the Fens," answered the boy.

"And what didst thou learn there, forward imp?"

"To catch gulls, with their webbed feet and yellow stockings," said the boy.

"Umph!" said Blount, looking down on his own immense roses. "Nay, then the devil take him asks thee more questions."

Meantime, Tressilian traversed the full length of the great hall, in which the astonished courtiers formed various groups, and were whispering mysteriously together, while all kept their eyes fixed on the door which led from the upper end of the hall into the Queen's withdrawing apartment. Raleigh pointed to the door. Tressilian knocked, and was instantly admitted. Many a neck was stretched to gain a view into the interior of the apartment; but the tapestry which covered the door on the inside was dropped too suddenly to admit the slightest gratification of curiosity.

Upon entrance, Tressilian found himself, not without a strong palpitation of heart, in the presence of Elizabeth, who was walking to and fro in a violent agitation, which she seemed to scorn to conceal, while two or three of her most sage and confidential counsellors exchanged anxious looks with each other, but delayed

speaking till her wrath had abated. Before the empty chair of state in which she had been seated, and which was half pushed aside by the violence with which she had started from it, knelt Leicester, his arms crossed and his brows bent on the ground, still and motionless as the effigies upon a sepulcher. Beside him stood the Lord Shrewsbury, then Earl Marshal of England, holding his baton of office; the earl's sword was unbuckled, and lay before him on the floor.

"Ho, sir," said the Queen, coming close up to Tressilian, and stamping on the floor with the action and manner of Henry himself; "*you* knew of this fair work — *you* are an accomplice in this deception which has been practiced on us — *you* have been a main cause of our doing injustice?" Tressilian dropped on his knee before the Queen, his good sense showing him the risk of attempting any defense at that moment of irritation. "Art dumb, sirrah?" she continued; "thou know'st of this affair, dost thou not?"

"Not, gracious madam, that this poor lady was Countess of Leicester."

"Nor shall any one know her for such," said Elizabeth. "Death of my life! Countess of Leicester! I say Dame Amy Dudley; and well if she have not cause to write herself widow of the traitor Robert Dudley."

"Madam," said Leicester, "do with me what it may be your will to do, but work no injury on this gentleman; he hath in no way deserved it."

"And will he be the better for thy intercession," said the Queen, leaving Tressilian, who slowly arose, and rushing to Leicester, who continued kneeling — "the better for *thy* intercession, thou doubly false — thou doubly forsworn — of thy intercession, whose villainy hath made me ridiculous to my subjects and odious to myself? I could tear out mine eyes for their blindness!"

Burleigh here ventured to interpose.

"Madam," he said, "remember that you are a queen — queen of England — mother of your people. Give not way to this wild storm of passion."

Elizabeth turned round to him, while a tear actually twinkled in her proud and angry eye. "Burleigh," she said, "thou art a statesman; thou dost not, thou canst not, comprehend half the scorn, half the misery, that man has poured on me!"

With the utmost caution, with the deepest reverence, Burleigh took her hand at the moment he saw her heart was at the fullest, and led her aside to an oriel window, apart from the others.

"Madam," he said, "I am a statesman, but I am also a man — a man already grown old in your councils, who have not, and cannot have, a wish on earth but your glory and happiness; I pray you to be composed."

"Ah, Burleigh," said Elizabeth, "thou little knowest ——" here her tears fell over her cheeks in despite of her.

"I do — I do know, my honored sovereign. Oh, beware that you lead not others to guess that which they know not!"

"Ha!" said Elizabeth, pausing as if a new train of thought had suddenly shot across her brain. "Burleigh, thou art right — thou art right — anything but disgrace — anything but a confession of weakness — anything rather than seem the cheated — slighted ——"

"Be but yourself, my Queen," said Burleigh; "and soar far above a weakness which no Englishman will ever believe his Elizabeth could have entertained, unless the violence of her disappointment carries a sad conviction to his bosom."

"What weakness, my lord?" said Elizabeth, haughtily; "would you too insinuate that the favor in which I held yonder proud traitor derived its source from aught ——" But here she could no longer sustain the proud tone which she had assumed, and again softened as she said, "But why should I strive to deceive even thee, my good and wise servant?"

Burleigh stooped to kiss her hand with affection, and — rare

in the annals of courts — a tear of true sympathy dropped from the eye of the minister on the hand of his sovereign.

It is probable that the consciousness of possessing this sympathy aided Elizabeth in supporting her mortification and suppressing her extreme resentment; but she was still more moved by fear that her passion should betray to the public the affront and the disappointment which, alike as a woman and a queen, she was so anxious to conceal. She turned from Burleigh, and sternly paced the hall till her features had recovered their usual dignity and her mien its wonted stateliness of regular motion.

“Our sovereign is her noble self once more,” whispered Burleigh to Walsingham; “mark what she does, and take heed you thwart her not.”

She then approached Leicester, and said, with calmness, “My Lord Shrewsbury, we discharge you of your prisoner. My Lord of Leicester, rise and take up your sword; a quarter of an hour’s restraint, under the custody of our marshal, my lord, is, we think, no high penance for months of falsehood practiced upon us. We will now hear the progress of this affair.” She then seated herself in her chair, and said, “You, Tressilian, step forward and say what you know.”

Tressilian told his story generously, suppressing as much as he could what affected Leicester, and saying nothing of their having twice actually fought together. It is very probable that, in doing so, he did the earl good service; for had the Queen at that instant found anything on account of which she might vent her wrath upon him, without laying open sentiments of which she was ashamed, it might have fared hard with him. She paused when Tressilian had finished his tale.

“We will take that Wayland,” she said, “into our own service, and place the boy in our secretary office for instruction, that he may in future use discretion towards letters. For you, Tressilian, you did wrong in not communicating the whole truth to us, and your promise not to do so was both imprudent and undutiful.

Yet, having given your word to this unhappy lady, it was the part of a man and a gentleman to keep it; and, on the whole, we esteem you for the character you have sustained in this matter. My Lord of Leicester, it is now your turn to tell us the truth, an exercise to which you seem of late to have been too much a stranger."

Accordingly, she extorted, by successive questions, the whole history of his first acquaintance with Amy Robsart — their marriage — his jealousy — the causes on which it was founded, and many particulars besides. Leicester's confession, for such it might be called, was wrenched from him piecemeal, yet was upon the whole accurate, excepting that he totally omitted to mention that he had, by implication or otherwise, assented to Varney's designs upon the life of his countess. Yet the consciousness of this was what at that moment lay nearest to his heart; and although he trusted in great measure to the very positive counter-orders which he had sent by Lambourne, it was his purpose to set out for Cumnor Place in person as soon as he should be dismissed from the presence of the Queen, who, he concluded, would presently leave Kenilworth.

But the earl reckoned without his host. It is true, his presence and his communications were gall and wormwood to his once partial mistress. But, barred from every other and more direct mode of revenge, the Queen perceived that she gave her false suitor torture by these inquiries, and dwelt on them for that reason, no more regarding the pain which she herself experienced than the savage cares for the searing of his own hands by grasping the hot pincers with which he tears the flesh of his captive enemy.

At length, however, the haughty lord, like a deer that turns to bay, gave intimation that his patience was failing. "Madam," he said, "I have been much to blame, more than even your just resentment has expressed. Yet, madam, let me say, that my guilt, if it be unpardonable, was not unprovoked; and that, if

beauty and condescending dignity could seduce the frail heart of a human being, I might plead both as the causes of my concealing this secret from your Majesty."

The Queen was so much struck by this reply, which Leicester took care should be heard by no one but herself, that she was for the moment silenced, and the earl had the temerity to pursue his advantage. "Your Grace, who has pardoned so much, will excuse my throwing myself on your royal mercy for those expressions which were yester-morning accounted but a light offense."

The Queen fixed her eyes on him while she replied, "Now, by Heaven, my lord, thy effrontery passes the bounds of belief as well as patience! But it shall avail thee nothing. What, ho! my lords, come all and hear the news. My Lord of Leicester's stolen marriage has cost me a husband and England a king. His lordship is patriarchal in his tastes; one wife at a time was insufficient, and he designed us the honor of his left hand. Now, is not this too insolent — that I could not grace him with a few marks of court favor, but he must presume to think my hand and crown at his disposal? You, however, think better of me; and I can pity this ambitious man, as I could a child whose bubble of soap has burst between his hands. We go to the presence-chamber. My Lord of Leicester, we command your close attendance on us."

All was eager expectation in the hall, and what was the universal astonishment when the Queen said to those next her, "The revels of Kenilworth are not yet exhausted, my lords and ladies: we are to solemnize the noble owner's marriage."

There was an universal expression of surprise.

"It is true, on our royal word," said the Queen; "he hath kept this a secret even from us, that he might surprise us with it at this very place and time. I see you are dying of curiosity to know the happy bride. It is Amy Robsart, the same who, to make up the May-game yesterday, figured in the pageant as the wife of his servant Varney."

"For God's sake, madam," said the earl, approaching her with a mixture of humility, vexation, and shame in his countenance, and speaking so low as to be heard by no one else, "take my head, as you threatened in your anger, and spare me these taunts! Urge not a falling man — tread not on a crushed worm."

"A worm, my lord!" said the Queen, in the same tone; "nay, a snake is the nobler reptile, and the more exact similitude — the frozen snake you wot of, which was warmed in a certain bosom ——"

"For your own sake — for mine, madam," said the earl — "while there is yet some reason left in me ——"

"Speak aloud, my lord," said Elizabeth, "and at farther distance, so please you; your breath thaws our ruff. What have you to ask of us?"

"Permission," said the unfortunate earl, humbly, "to travel to Cumnor Place."

"To fetch home your bride belike? Why, ay, that is but right, for, as we have heard, she is indifferently cared for there. But, my lord, you go not in person; we have counted upon passing certain days in this castle of Kenilworth, and it were slight courtesy to leave us without a landlord during our residence here. Under your favor, we cannot think to incur such disgrace in the eyes of our subjects. Tressilian shall go to Cumnor Place instead of you, and with him some gentleman who hath been sworn of our chamber, lest my Lord of Leicester should be again jealous of his old rival. Whom wouldst thou have to be in commission with thee, Tressilian?"

Tressilian, with humble deference, suggested the name of Raleigh.

"Why, ay," said the Queen; "so God ha' me, thou hast made a good choice. He is a young knight besides, and to deliver a lady from prison is an appropriate first adventure. Cumnor Place is little better than a prison, you are to know, my lords and ladies. You will furnish them, Master Secretary, with

the warrant necessary to secure the bodies of Richard Varney and the foreign Alasco, dead or alive. Take a sufficient force with you, gentlemen; bring the lady here in all honor; lose no time, and God be with you!"

They bowed, and left the presence.

Who shall describe how the rest of that day was spent at Kenilworth? The Queen, who seemed to have remained there for the sole purpose of mortifying and taunting the Earl of Leicester, showed herself as skillful in that female art of vengeance as she was in the science of wisely governing her people. The train of state soon caught the signal, and, as he walked among his own splendid preparations, the Lord of Kenilworth, in his own castle, already experienced the lot of a disgraced courtier, in the slight regard and cold manners of alienated friends, and the ill-concealed triumph of avowed and open enemies. Sussex, from his natural military frankness of disposition, Burleigh and Walsingham, from their penetrating and prospective sagacity, and some of the ladies, from the compassion of their sex, were the only persons in the crowded court who retained towards him the countenance they had borne in the morning.

So much had Leicester been accustomed to consider court favor as the principal object of his life, that all other sensations were, for the time, lost in the agony which his haughty spirit felt at the succession of petty insults and studied neglects to which he had been subjected; but when he retired to his own chamber for the night, that long fair tress of hair which had once secured Amy's letter fell under his observation, and, with the influence of a counter-charm, awakened his heart to nobler and more natural feelings. He kissed it a thousand times; and while he recollected that he had it always in his power to shun the mortifications which he had that day undergone, by retiring into a dignified and even prince-like seclusion with the beautiful and beloved partner of his future life, he felt that he could rise above the revenge which Elizabeth had condescended to take.

Accordingly, on the following day, the whole conduct of the earl displayed so much dignified equanimity; he seemed so solicitous about the accommodations and amusements of his guests, yet so indifferent to their personal demeanor towards him; so respectfully distant to the Queen, yet so patient of her harassing displeasure, that Elizabeth changed her manner to him, and, though cold and distant, ceased to offer him any direct affront. She intimated also, with some sharpness, to others around her, who thought they were consulting her pleasure in showing a neglectful conduct to the earl, that, while they remained at Kenilworth, they ought to show the civility due from guests to the lord of the castle. In short, matters were so far changed in twenty-four hours that some of the more experienced and sagacious courtiers foresaw a strong possibility of Leicester's restoration to favor, and regulated their demeanor towards him, as those who might one day claim merit for not having deserted him in adversity. It is time, however, to leave these intrigues, and follow Tressilian and Raleigh on their journey.

The troop consisted of six persons; for, besides Wayland, they had in company a royal pursuivant and two stout serving-men. All were well armed, and traveled as fast as it was possible with justice to their horses, which had a long journey before them. They endeavored to procure some tidings as they rode along of Varney and his party, but could hear none, as they had traveled in the dark. At a small village about twelve miles from Kenilworth, where they gave some refreshment to their horses, a poor clergyman, the curate of the place, came out of a small cottage, and entreated any of the company who might know aught of surgery to look in for an instant on a dying man.

The empiric Wayland undertook to do his best, and as the curate conducted him to the spot, he learned that the man had been found on the highroad, about a mile from the village, by laborers, as they were going to their work on the preceding morning, and the curate had given him shelter in his house. He had

received a gunshot wound which seemed to be obviously mortal, but whether in a brawl or from robbers they could not learn, as he was in a fever, and spoke nothing connectedly. Wayland entered the dark and lowly apartment, and no sooner had the curate drawn aside the curtain than he knew in the distorted features of the patient the countenance of Michael Lambourne. Under pretense of seeking something which he wanted, Wayland hastily apprised his fellow-travelers of this extraordinary circumstance; and both Tressilian and Raleigh, full of boding apprehensions, hastened to the curate's house to see the dying man.

The wretch was by this time in the agonies of death, from which a much better surgeon than Wayland could not have rescued him, for the bullet had passed clear through his body. He was sensible, however, at least in part, for he knew Tressilian, and made signs that he wished him to stoop over his bed. Tressilian did so, and after some inarticulate murmurs, in which the names of Varney and Lady Leicester were alone distinguishable, Lambourne bade him "Make haste, or he would come too late."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WE are now to return to that part of our story where we intimated that Varney, possessed of the authority of the Earl of Leicester, and of the Queen's permission to the same effect, hastened to secure himself against discovery of his perfidy by removing the countess from Kenilworth Castle. He had proposed to set forth early in the morning; but reflecting that the earl might relent in the interim, and seek another interview with the countess, he resolved to prevent, by immediate departure, all chance of what would probably have ended in his detection and ruin. For this purpose he called for Lambourne, and was exceedingly incensed to find that his trusty attendant was abroad on some ramble in the neighboring village or elsewhere. As his

return was expected, Sir Richard commanded that he should prepare himself for attending him on an immediate journey, and follow him in case he returned after his departure.

In the meanwhile, Varney used the ministry of a servant called Robin Tider, one to whom the mysteries of Cumnor Place were already in some degree known, as he had been there more than once in attendance on the earl. To this man, whose character resembled that of Lambourne, though he was neither quite so prompt nor altogether so profligate, Varney gave command to have three horses saddled and to prepare a horse litter, and have them in readiness at the postern gate. The natural enough excuse of his lady's insanity, which was now universally believed, accounted for the secrecy with which she was to be removed from the castle, and he reckoned on the same apology in case the unfortunate Amy's resistance or screams should render such necessary. The agency of Anthony Foster was indispensable, and that Varney now went to secure.

This person, naturally of a sour, unsocial disposition, and somewhat tired, besides, with his journey from Cumnor to Warwickshire, in order to bring the news of the countess's escape, had early extricated himself from the crowd of wassailers, and betaken himself to his chamber, where he lay asleep, when Varney, completely equipped for traveling, and with a dark lantern in his hand, entered his apartment. He paused an instant to listen to what his associate was murmuring in his sleep, and could plainly distinguish the words, "*Ave Maria, ora pro nobis*; no — it runs not so. Deliver us from evil — ay, so it goes."

"Praying in his sleep," said Varney, "and confounding his old and new devotions. He must have more need of prayer ere I am done with him. What ho! holy man — most blessed penitent! Awake — awake!"

As Varney at the same time shook the sleeper by the arm, it changed the current of his ideas, and he roared out, "Thieves! — thieves! I will die in defense of my gold — my hard-won

gold, that has cost me so dear. Where is Janet? Is Janet safe?"

"Safe enough, thou bellowing fool!" said Varney; "art thou not ashamed of thy clamor?"

Foster by this time was broad awake, and, sitting up in his bed, asked Varney the meaning of so untimely a visit.

"Why, thou fool, it is but to escort thy charge back to Cumnor Place."

"Is that indeed all?" said Foster; "thou look'st deadly pale, and thou art not moved by trifles — is that indeed all?"

"Ay, that — and maybe a trifle more," answered Varney.

"Ah, that trifle more!" said Foster; "still thou look'st paler and paler."

"Heed not my countenance," said Varney, "you see it by this wretched light. Up and be doing, man. Think of Cumnor Place, thine own proper copyhold. Why, thou mayst found a weekly lectureship, besides endowing Janet like a baron's daughter. Seventy pounds and odd."

"Seventy-nine pounds, five shillings, and fivepence halfpenny, besides the value of the wood," said Foster; "and I am to have it all as copyhold?"

"All, man — squirrels and all; no gipsy shall cut the value of a broom, no boy so much as take a bird's nest, without paying thee a quittance. Ay, that is right — don thy matters as fast as possible; horses and everything are ready, all save that accursed villain Lambourne, who is out on some infernal gambol."

"Ay, Sir Richard," said Foster, "you would take no advice. I ever told you that drunken profligate would fail you at need. Now, I could have helped you to a sober young man."

"What, some slow-spoken, long-breathed brother of the congregation? Why, we shall have use for such also, man. Heaven be praised, we shall lack laborers of every kind. Ay, that is right — forget not your pistols. Come now, and let us away."

"Whither?" said Anthony.

"To my lady's chamber, and, mind, she *must* along with us. Thou art not a fellow to be startled by a shriek?"

"Not if Scripture reason can be rendered for it; and it is written, 'Wives, obey your husbands.' But will my lord's commands bear us out if we use violence?"

"Tush, man! here is his signet," answered Varney; and having thus silenced the objections of his associate, they went together to Lord Hunsdon's apartments, and, acquainting the sentinel with their purpose, as a matter sanctioned by the Queen and the Earl of Leicester, they entered the chamber of the unfortunate countess.

The horror of Amy may be conceived when, starting from a broken slumber, she saw at her bedside Varney, 'he man on earth she most feared and hated. It was even a consolation to see that he was not alone, though she had so much reason to dread his sullen companion.

"Madam," said Varney, "there is no time for ceremony. My Lord of Leicester, having fully considered the exigencies of the time, sends you his orders immediately to accompany us on our return to Cumnor Place. See, here is his signet, in token of his instant and pressing commands."

"It is false!" said the countess; "thou hast stolen the warrant — thou, who art capable of every villainy, from the blackest to the basest!"

"It is true, madam," replied Varney; "so true, that if you do not instantly arise and prepare to attend us, we must compel you to obey our orders."

"Compel! thou dardest not put it to that issue, base as thou art," exclaimed the unhappy countess.

"That remains to be proved, madam," said Varney, who had determined on intimidation as the only means of subduing her high spirit; "if you put me to it, you will find me a rough groom of the chamber."

It was at this threat that Amy screamed so fearfully that, had it not been for the received opinion of her insanity, she would quickly have had Lord Hunsdon and others to her aid. Perceiving, however, that her cries were vain, she appealed to Foster in the most affecting terms, conjuring him, as his daughter Janet's honor and purity was dear to him, not to permit her to be treated with unwomanly violence.

"Why, madam, wives must obey their husbands — there's Scripture warrant for it," said Foster; "and if you will dress yourself and come with us patiently, there's no one shall lay finger on you while I can draw a pistol trigger."

Seeing no help arrive, and comforted even by the dogged language of Foster, the countess promised to arise and dress herself, if they would agree to retire from the room. Varney at the same time assured her of all safety and honor while in their hands, and promised that he himself would not approach her, since his presence was so displeasing. Her husband, he added, would be at Cumnor Place within twenty-four hours after they had reached it.

Somewhat comforted by this assurance, upon which, however, she saw little reason to rely, the unhappy Amy made her toilette by the assistance of the lantern, which they left with her when they quitted the apartment.

Weeping, trembling, and praying, the unfortunate lady dressed herself — with sensations how different from the days in which she was wont to decorate herself in all the pride of conscious beauty! She endeavored to delay the completing her dress as long as she could, until, terrified by the impatience of Varney, she was obliged to declare herself ready to attend them.

When they were about to move, the countess clung to Foster with such an appearance of terror at Varney's approach, that the latter protested to her, with a deep oath, that he had no intention whatever of even coming near her. "If you do but consent to execute your husband's will in quietness, you shall," he said,

"see but little of me. I will leave you undisturbed to the care of the usher whom your good taste prefers."

"My husband's will!" she exclaimed. "But it is the will of God, and let that be sufficient to me. I will go with Master Foster as unresistingly as ever did a literal sacrifice. He is a father at least, and will have decency if not humanity. For thee, Varney, were it my latest word, thou art an equal stranger to both."

Varney replied only, she was at liberty to choose, and walked some paces before them to show the way; while, half-leaning on Foster and half-carried by him, the countess was transported from Saintlowe's Tower to the postern gate, where Tider waited with the litter and horses.

The countess was placed in the former without resistance. She saw with some satisfaction, that, while Foster and Tider rode close by the litter, which the latter conducted, the dreaded Varney lingered behind, and was soon lost in darkness. A little while she strove, as the road winded round the verge of the lake, to keep sight of those stately towers which called her husband lord, and which still, in some places, sparkled with lights, where wassailers were yet revelling. But when the direction of the road rendered this no longer possible, she drew back her head, and, sinking down in the litter, recommended herself to the care of Providence.

Besides the desire of inducing the countess to proceed quietly on her journey, Varney had it also in view to have an interview with Lambourne, by whom he every moment expected to be joined, without the presence of any witnesses. He knew the character of this man — prompt, bloody, resolute, and greedy — and judged him the most fit agent he could employ in his farther designs. But ten miles of their journey had been measured ere he heard the hasty clatter of horse's hoofs behind him, and was overtaken by Michael Lambourne.

Fretted as he was with his absence, Varney received his profl-

gate servant with a rebuke of unusual bitterness. "Drunken villain," he said, "thy idleness and debauched folly will stretch a halter ere it be long; and, for me, I care not how soon!"

This style of objurgation, Lambourne, who was elated to an unusual degree, not only by an extraordinary cup of wine, but by the sort of confidential interview he had just had with the earl, and the secret of which he had made himself master, did not receive with his wonted humility. "He would take no insolence of language," he said, "from the best knight that ever wore spurs. Lord Leicester had detained him on some business of import, and that was enough for Varney, who was but a servant like himself."

Varney was not a little surprised at his unusual tone of insolence; but, ascribing it to liquor, suffered it to pass as if unnoticed, and then began to tamper with Lambourne touching his willingness to aid in removing out of the Earl of Leicester's way an obstacle to a rise which would put it in his power to reward his trusty followers to their utmost wish. And upon Michael Lambourne's seeming ignorant what was meant, he plainly indicated "the litter-load, yonder," as the impediment which he desired should be removed.

"Look you, Sir Richard, and so forth," said Michael, "some are wiser than some, that is one thing, and some are worse than some, that's another. I know my lord's mind on this matter better than thou, for he hath trusted me fully in the matter. Here are his mandates, and his last words were, 'Michael Lambourne' — for his lordship speaks to me as a gentleman of the sword, and useth not the words 'drunken villain,' or such-like phrases of those who know not how to bear new dignities — 'Varney,' says he, 'must pay the utmost respect to my countess, I trust to you for looking to it, Lambourne,' says his lordship, 'and you must bring back my signet from him peremptorily.'"

"Ay," replied Varney, "said he so, indeed? You know all, then?"

"All — all, and you were as wise to make a friend of me while the weather is fair betwixt us."

"And was there no one present," said Varney, "when my lord so spoke?"

"Not a breathing creature," replied Lambourne. "Think you my lord would trust anyone with such matter save an approved man of action like myself?"

"Most true," said Varney; and, making a pause, he looked forward on the moonlight road. They were traversing a wide and open heath. The litter, being at least a mile before them, was both out of sight and hearing. He looked behind, and there was an expanse, lighted by the moonbeams, without one human being in sight. He resumed his speech to Lambourne: "And will you turn upon your master, who has introduced you to this career of court-like favor — whose apprentice you have been, Michael — who has taught you the depths and shallows of court intrigue?"

"Michael not me!" said Lambourne; "I have a name will brook a master before it as well as another; and as to the rest, if I have been an apprentice, my indenture is out, and I am resolute to set up for myself."

"Take thy quittance first, thou fool!" said Varney; and with a pistol, which he had for some time held in his hand, shot Lambourne through the body.

The wretch fell from his horse without a single groan; and Varney, dismounting, rifled his pockets, turning out the lining, that it might appear he had fallen by robbers. He secured the earl's packet, which was his chief object, but he also took Lambourne's purse, containing some gold pieces, the relics of what his debauchery had left him, and, from a singular combination of feelings, carried it in his hand only the length of a small river which crossed the road, into which he threw it as far as he could fling. Such are the strange remnants of conscience which remain after she seems totally subdued, that this cruel and remorseless

man would have felt himself degraded had he pocketed the few pieces belonging to the wretch whom he had thus ruthlessly slain.

The murderer reloaded his pistol, after cleansing the lock and barrel from the appearances of late explosion, and rode calmly after the litter, satisfying himself that he had so adroitly removed a troublesome witness to many of his intrigues, and the bearer of mandates which he had no intentions to obey, and which, therefore, he was desirous it should be thought had never reached his hand.

The remainder of the journey was made with a degree of speed which showed the little care they had for the health of the unhappy countess. They paused only at places where all was under their command, and where the tale they were prepared to tell of the insane Lady Varney would have obtained ready credit had she made an attempt to appeal to the compassion of the few persons admitted to see her. But Amy saw no chance of obtaining a hearing from any to whom she had an opportunity of addressing herself, and, besides was too terrified for the presence of Varney to violate the implied condition under which she was to travel free from his company. The authority of Varney, often so used during the earl's private journeys to Cumnor, readily procured relays of horses where wanted, so that they approached Cumnor Place upon the night after they left Kenilworth.

At this period of the journey, Varney came up to the rear of the litter, as he had done before repeatedly during their progress, and asked, "What does she?"

"She sleeps," said Foster. "I would we were home; her strength is exhausted."

"Rest will restore her," answered Varney. "She shall soon sleep sound and long; we must consider how to lodge her in safety."

"In her own apartments, to be sure," said Foster. "I have

sent Janet to her aunt's, with a proper rebuke, and the old women are truth itself, for they hate this lady cordially."

"We will not trust them, however, friend Anthony," said Varney; "we must secure her in that stronghold where you keep your gold."

"My gold!" said Anthony, much alarmed; "why, what gold have I? God help me, I have no gold — I would I had."

"Now, marry hang thee, thou stupid brute, who thinks of, or cares for, thy gold? If I did, could I not find an hundred better ways to come at it? In one word, thy bedchamber, which thou hast fenced so curiously, must be her place of seclusion; and thou, thou hind, shalt press her pillows of down. I dare to say the earl will never ask after the rich furniture of these four rooms."

This last consideration rendered Foster tractable; he only asked permission to ride before, to make matters ready, and, spurring his horse, he posted before the litter, while, Varney falling about threescore paces behind it, it remained only attended by Tider.

When they had arrived at Cumnor Place, the countess asked eagerly for Janet, and showed much alarm when informed that she was no longer to have the attendance of that amiable girl.

"My daughter is dear to me, madam," said Foster, gruffly; "and I desire not that she should get the court tricks of lying and 'scaping; somewhat too much of that has she learned already, an it please your ladyship."

The countess, much fatigued and greatly terrified by the circumstances of her journey, made no answer to this insolence, but mildly expressed a wish to retire to her chamber.

"Ay — ay," muttered Foster; "'tis but reasonable, but under favor, you go not to your gew-gaw toy-house yonder; you will sleep to-night in better security."

"I would it were in my grave," said the countess, "but that mortal feelings shiver at the idea of soul and body parting."

"You, I guess, have no chance to shiver at that," replied Foster. "My lord comes hither to-morrow, and doubtless you will make your own ways good with him."

"But does he come hither? — does he indeed, good Foster?"

"Oh, ay, good Foster!" replied the other. "But what Foster shall I be to-morrow, when you speak of me to my lord; though all I have done was to obey his own orders?"

"You shall be my protector — a rough one, indeed, but still a protector," answered the countess. "Oh, that Janet were but here!"

"She is better where she is," answered Foster, "one of you is enough to perplex a plain head; but will you taste any refreshment?"

"Oh, no — no; my chamber — my chamber. I trust," she said, apprehensively, "I may secure it on the inside?"

"With all my heart," answered Foster, "so I may secure it on the outside;" and taking a light, he led the way to a part of the building where Amy had never been, and conducted her up a stair of great height, preceded by one of the old women with a lamp. At the head of the stair, which seemed of almost immeasurable height, they crossed a short wooden gallery, formed of black oak, and very narrow, at the farther end of which was a strong oaken door, which opened and admitted them into the miser's apartment, homely in its accommodations in the very last degree, and, except in name, little different from a prison room.

Foster stopped at the door and gave the lamp to the countess, without either offering or permitting the attendance of the old woman who had carried it. The lady stood not on ceremony, but taking it hastily, barred the door, and secured it with the ample means provided on the inside for that purpose.

Varney, meanwhile, had lurked behind on the stairs, but hearing the door barred, he now came up on tiptoe, and Foster, winking to him, pointed with self-complacence to a piece of con-

cealed machinery in the wall, which, playing with much ease and little noise, dropped a part of the wooden gallery, after the manner of a drawbridge, so as to cut off all communication between the door of the bedroom, which he usually inhabited, and the landing-place of the high winding stair which ascended to it. The rope by which this machinery was wrought was generally carried within the bedchamber, it being Foster's object to provide against invasion from without; but now that it was intended to secure the prisoner within, the cord had been brought over to the landing-place, and was there made fast, when Foster, with much complacency, had dropped the unsuspected trapdoor.

Varney looked with great attention at the machinery, and peeped more than once down the abyss which was opened by the fall of the trap door. It was dark as pitch, and seemed profoundly deep, going, as Foster informed his confederate in a whisper, nigh to the lowest vault of the castle. Varney cast once more a fixed and long look down into this sable gulf, and then followed Foster to the part of the manor house most usually inhabited.

When they arrived in the parlor which we have mentioned, Varney requested Foster to get them supper and some of the choicest wine. "I will seek Alasco," he added; "we have work for him to do, and we must put him in good heart."

Foster groaned at this intimation, but made no remonstrance. The old woman assured Varney that Alasco had scarce eaten or drunk since her master's departure, living perpetually shut up in the laboratory, and talking as if the world's continuance depended on what he was doing there.

"I will teach him that the world hath other claims on him," said Varney, seizing a light and going in quest of the alchemist. He returned, after a considerable absence, very pale, but yet with his habitual sneer on his cheek and nostril. "Our friend," he said, "has exhaled."

"How! what mean you?" said Foster. "Run away — fled

with my forty pound, that should have been multiplied a thousandfold? I will have hue and cry!"

"I will tell thee a surer way," said Varney.

"How! which way?" exclaimed Foster. "I will have back my forty pounds — I deemed them as surely a thousand times multiplied — I will have back my in-put, at the least."

"Go hang thyself, then, and sue Alasco in the Devil's Court of Chancery, for thither he has carried the cause."

"How! What dost thou mean — is he dead?"

"Ay, truly is he," said Varney; "and properly swoln already in the face and body. He had been mixing some of his devil's medicines, and the glass mask which he used constantly had fallen from his face, so that the subtle poison entered the brain and did its work."

"*Sancta Maria!*" said Foster — "I mean, God in His mercy preserve us from covetousness and deadly sin! Saw you no ingots in the crucibles?"

"Nay, I looked not but at the dead carrion," answered Varney — "an ugly spectacle; he was swoln like a corpse three days exposed on the wheel. Pah! give me a cup of wine."

"I will go," said Foster, "I will examine myself ——" He took the lamp and hastened to the door, but there hesitated and paused. "Will you not go with me?" said he to Varney.

"To what purpose?" said Varney; "I have seen and smelled enough to spoil my appetite. I broke the window, however, and let in the air; it reeked of sulphur and such-like suffocating steams, as if the very devil had been there."

"And might it not be the act of the demon himself?" said Foster, still hesitating; "I have heard he is powerful at such times, and with such people."

"Still, if it *were* that Satan of thine," answered Varney, "who thus jades thy imagination, thou art in perfect safety, unless he is a most unconscionable devil indeed. He hath had two good sops of late."

"How, *two* sops — what mean you?" said Foster — "what mean you?"

"You will know in time," said Varney. "And then this other banquet; but thou wilt esteem her too choice a morsel for the fiend's tooth; she must have her psalms, and harps, and seraphs."

Anthony Foster heard, and came slowly back to the table; "God! Sir Richard, and must that then be done?"

"Ay, in very truth, Anthony, or there comes no copyhold in thy way," replied his inflexible associate.

"I always foresaw it would land there!" said Foster; "but how, Sir Richard — how? for not to win the world would I put hands on her."

"I cannot blame thee," said Varney; "I should be reluctant to do that myself; we miss Alasco and his manna sorely — ay, and the dog Lambourne."

"Why, where tarries Lambourne?" said Anthony.

"Ask no questions," said Varney, "thou wilt see him one day, if thy creed is true. But to our graver matter. I will teach thee a springe, Tony, to catch a pewit; yonder trap door — yonder gimcrack of thine, will remain secure in appearance, will it not, though the supports are withdrawn beneath?"

"Ay, marry, will it," said Foster; "so long as it is not trodden on."

"But were the lady to attempt an escape over it," replied Varney, "her weight would carry it down?"

"A mouse's weight would do it," said Foster.

"Why, then, she dies in attempting her escape, and what could you or I help it, honest Tony? Let us to bed; we will adjust our project to-morrow."

On the next day, when evening approached, Varney summoned Foster to the execution of their plan. Tider and Foster's old man-servant were sent on a feigned errand down to the village, and Anthony himself, as if anxious to see that the countess

suffered no want of accommodation, visited her place of confinement. He was so much staggered at the mildness and patience with which she seemed to endure her confinement, that he could not help earnestly recommending to her not to cross the threshold of her room on any account whatever until Lord Leicester should come, "Which," he added, "I trust in God, will be very soon." Amy patiently promised that she would resign herself to her fate, and Foster returned to his hardened companion with his conscience half-eased of the perilous load that weighed on it. "I have warned her," he said; "surely in vain is the snare set in the sight of any bird!"

He left, therefore, the countess's door unsecured on the outside, and, under the eye of Varney, withdrew the supports which sustained the falling trap, which, therefore, kept its level position merely by a slight adhesion. They withdrew to wait the issue on the ground floor adjoining, but they waited long in vain. At length Varney, after walking long to and fro, with his face muffled in his cloak, threw it suddenly back, and exclaimed, "Surely never was a woman fool enough to neglect so fair an opportunity of escape!"

"Perhaps she is resolved," said Foster, "to await her husband's return."

"True! — most true," said Varney, rushing out, "I had not thought of that before."

In less than two minutes, Foster, who remained behind, heard the tread of a horse in the courtyard, and then a whistle similar to that which was the earl's usual signal; the instant after the door of the countess's chamber opened, and in the same moment the trap door gave way. There was a rushing sound — a heavy fall — a faint groan — and all was over.

At the same instant, Varney called in at the window, in an accent and tone which was an indescribable mixture betwixt horror and raillery — "Is the bird caught? — is the deed done?"

"O God, forgive us!" replied Anthony Foster.

"Why, thou fool," said Varney, "thy toil is ended, and thy reward secure. Look down into the vault — what seest thou?"

"I see only a heap of white clothes, like a snowdrift," said Foster. "O God, she moves her arm!"

"Hurl something down on her — thy gold chest, Tony — it is an heavy one."

"Varney, thou art an incarnate fiend!" replied Foster. "There needs nothing more — she is gone!"

"So pass our troubles," said Varney, entering the room. "I dreamed not I could have mimicked the earl's call so well."

"Oh, if there be judgment in Heaven, thou hast deserved it," said Foster, "and wilt meet it! Thou hast destroyed her by means of her best affections. It is a seething of the kid in the mother's milk."

"Thou art a fanatical ass," replied Varney. "Let us now think how the alarm should be given; the body is to remain where it is."

But their wickedness was to be permitted no longer; for, even while they were at this consultation, Tressilian and Raleigh broke in upon them, having obtained admittance by means of Tider and Foster's servant, whom they had secured at the village.

Anthony Foster fled on their entrance; and, knowing each corner and pass of the intricate old house, escaped all search. But Varney was taken on the spot; and, instead of expressing compunction for what he had done, seemed to take a fiendish pleasure in pointing out to them the remains of the murdered countess, while at the same time he defied them to show that he had any share in her death. The despairing grief of Tressilian, on viewing the mangled and yet warm remains of what had lately been so lovely and so beloved, was such that Raleigh was compelled to have him removed from the place by force, while he himself assumed the direction of what was to be done.

Varney, upon a second examination, made very little mystery either of the crime or of its motives; alleging, as a reason for

his frankness, that though much of what he confessed could only have attached to him by suspicion, yet such suspicion would have been sufficient to deprive him of Leicester's confidence, and to destroy all his towering plans of ambition. "I was not born," he said, "to drag on the remainder of life a degraded outcast; nor will I so die that my fate shall make a holiday to the vulgar herd.'

From these words it was apprehended he had some design upon himself, and he was carefully deprived of all means by which such could be carried into execution. But, like some of the heroes of antiquity, he carried about his person a small quantity of strong poison, prepared probably by the celebrated Demetrius Alasco. Having swallowed this potion over-night, he was found next morning dead in his cell; nor did he appear to have suffered much agony, his countenance presenting, even in death, the habitual expression of sneering sarcasm which was predominant while he lived. "The wicked man," saith Scripture, "hath no bonds in his death."

The fate of his colleague in wickedness was long unknown. Cumnor Place was deserted immediately after the murder; for, in the vicinity of what was called the Lady Dudley's chamber the domestics pretended to hear groans, and screams, and other supernatural noises. After a certain length of time, Janet, hearing no tidings of her father, became the uncontrolled mistress of his property, and conferred it with her hand upon Wayland, now a man of settled character, and holding a place in Elizabeth's household. But it was after they had been both dead for some years, that their eldest son and heir, in making some researches about Cumnor Hall, discovered a secret passage, closed by an iron door, which, opening from behind the bed in the Lady Dudley's chamber, descended to a sort of cell, in which they found an iron chest containing a quantity of gold, and a human skeleton stretched above it. The fate of Anthony Foster was now manifest. He had fled to this place of concealment, for-

getting the key of the spring-lock; and being barred from escape by the means he had used for preservation of that gold for which he had sold his salvation, he had there perished miserably. Unquestionably the groans and screams heard by the domestics were not entirely imaginary, but were those of this wretch, who, in his agony, was crying for relief and succor.

The news of the countess's dreadful fate put a sudden period to the pleasures of Kenilworth. Leicester retired from court, and for a considerable time abandoned himself to his remorse. But as Varney, in his last declaration, had been studious to spare the character of his patron, the earl was the object rather of compassion than resentment. The Queen at length recalled him to court; he was once more distinguished as a statesman and favorite, and the rest of his career is well known to history. But there was something retributive in his death, if, according to an account very generally received, it took place from his swallowing a draught of poison which was designed by him for another person.

Sir Hugh Robsart died very soon after his daughter, having settled his estate on Tressilian. But neither the prospect of rural independence nor the promises of favor which Elizabeth held out to induce him to follow the court, could remove his profound melancholy. Wherever he went, he seemed to see before him the disfigured corpse of the early and only object of his affection. At length, having made provision for the maintenance of the old friends and old servants who formed Sir Hugh's family at Lidcote Hall, he himself embarked with his friend Raleigh for the Virginia expedition, and, young in years but old in grief, died before his day in that foreign land.

An Introduction to the Study of American Literature

BY

BRANDER MATTHEWS

Professor of Literature in Columbia University

Cloth, 12mo, 256 pages - - - Price, \$1.00

A text-book of literature on an original plan, and conforming with the best methods of teaching.

Admirably designed to guide, to supplement, and to stimulate the student's reading of American authors.

Illustrated with a fine collection of facsimile manuscripts, portraits of authors, and views of their homes and birthplaces.

Bright, clear, and fascinating, it is itself a literary work of high rank.

The book consists mostly of delightfully readable and yet comprehensive little biographies of the fifteen greatest and most representative American writers. Each of the sketches contains a critical estimate of the author and his works, which is the more valuable coming, as it does, from one who is himself a master. The work is rounded out by four general chapters which take up other prominent authors and discuss the history and conditions of our literature as a whole; and there is at the end of the book a complete chronology of the best American literature from the beginning down to 1896.

Each of the fifteen biographical sketches is illustrated by a fine portrait of its subject and views of his birthplace or residence and in some cases of both. They are also accompanied by each author's facsimile manuscript covering one or two pages. The book contains excellent portraits of many other authors famous in American literature.

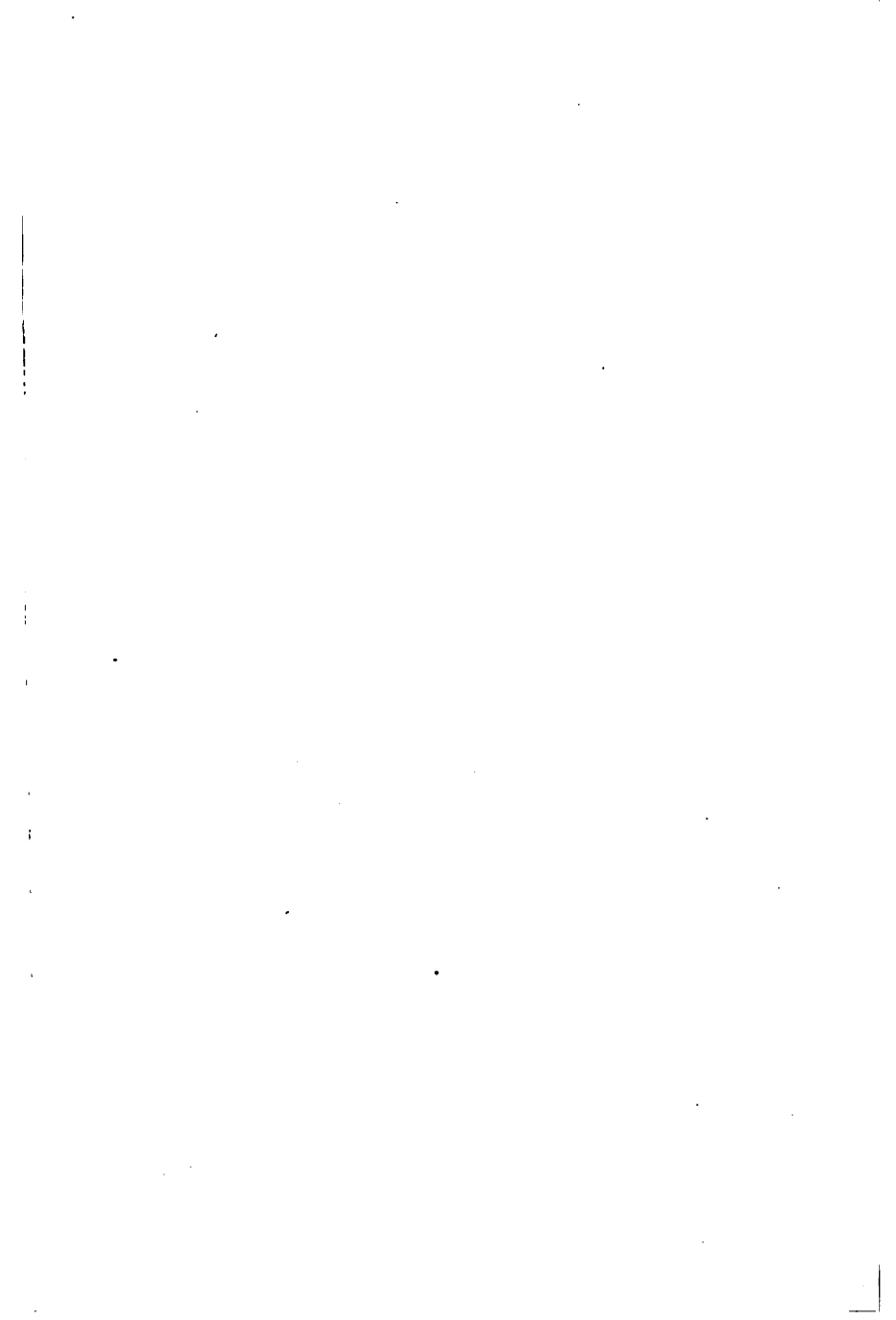
Copies of Brander Matthews' Introduction to the Study of American Literature will be sent prepaid to any address, on receipt of the price, by the Publishers:

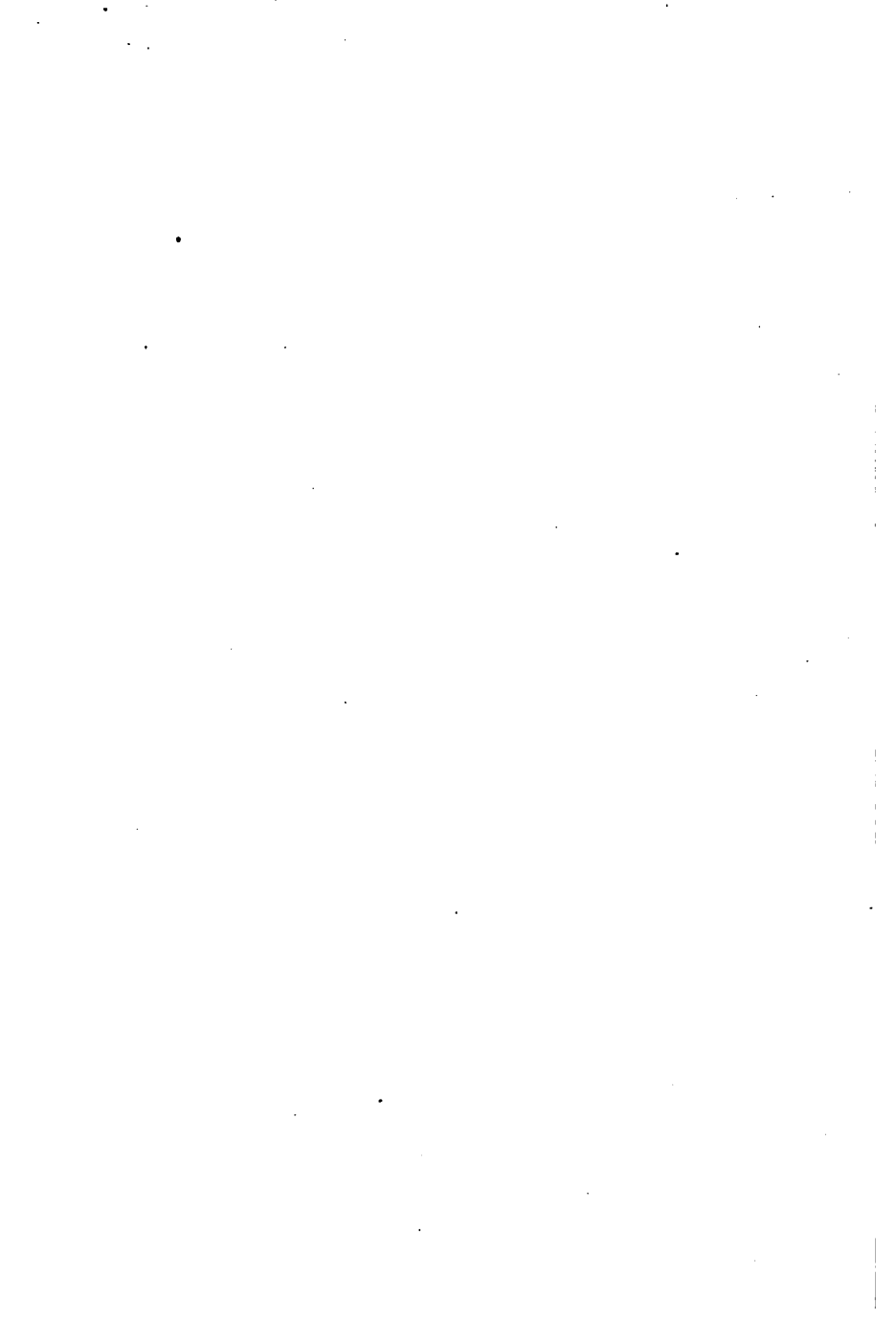
American Book Company

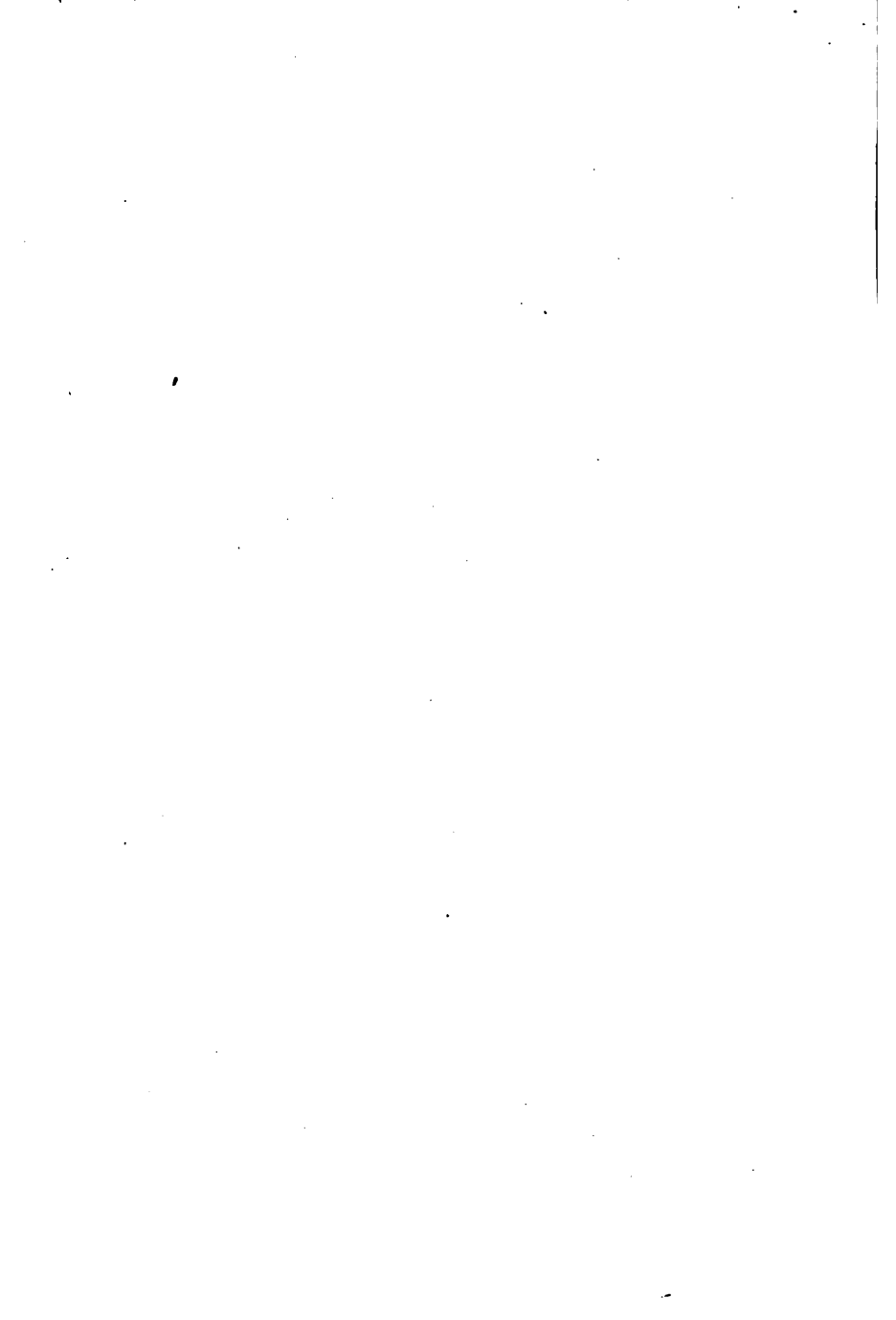
New York

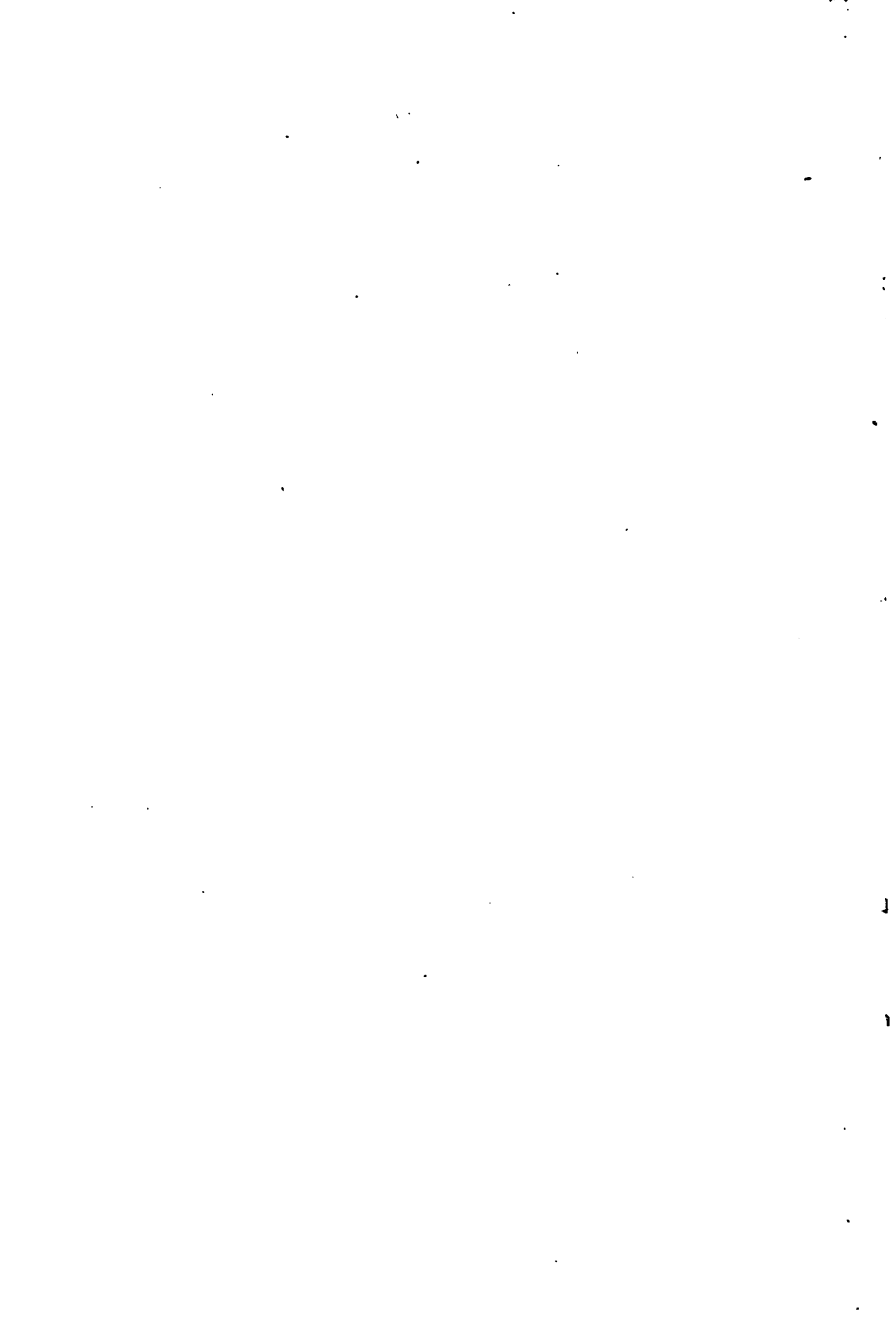
Cincinnati

Chicago









This textbook may be borrowed for two weeks, with the privilege of renewing it once. A fine of five cents a day is incurred by failure to return a book on the date when it is due.

The Education Library is open from 9 to 9 every week day except Saturday when it closes at 5.

DUE

DUE

APR 28 1922

